

RATED: NINJA GAIDEN + SCOOP! THE NEW MORTAL KOMBAT

# XBN



XBOX NATION THE ADVANCED XBOX MAGAZINE

INSIDE

IS PSI-OPS THE NEXT BIG THING?

**PARIAH: FIRST SCREENS**  
THE ULTIMATE XBOX GAME  
BUYERS' GUIDE  
**SCOOP! UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2**

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INSIDE >

**XBOX LIVE**  
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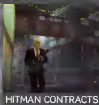
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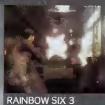
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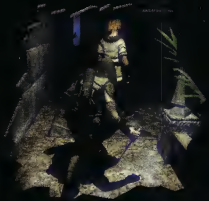
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XEN

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IS BACK AND BETTER THAN EVER"

XBOX MAGAZINE



COMING  
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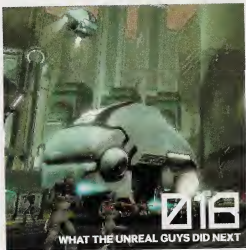


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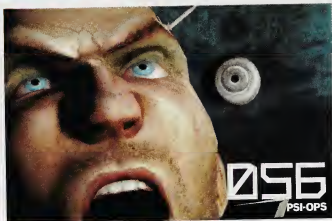


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FABLE



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WHAT THE UNREAL GUYS DID NEXT



**056**  
PSI-OPS

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Write to us at  
XBN@ziffdavis.com. Like, now.

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### Get bent!

In the future, there will be comedy and, almost certainly, jetpacks.  
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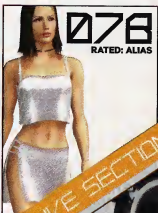
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GAME OF THE MONTH  
**XBN**  
MAY 2004

**082**

MMWAH-HAHAHAHA! IT'S NINJA GAIDEN!

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CHECK OUT XBN'S NEW LIVE SECTION!

**042**  
LOG ON



# MISSING IN ACTION

## Hitman got clipped, and Capcom laid an egg

It's been a weird month. The Friday before this magazine went to press, our feature review of *Hitman: Contracts* got clipped. Shot in the head and dumped in the river. Eidos, which publishes the game, just couldn't get us a final version in time for the deadline. Panic ensued, and Fable came to the rescue. Peter Molyneux having had the dubious honor of being trapped in a room with XBN's Greg Orlando for an hour during the DICE summit in Las Vegas (where the big cheeses of the game industry talk about, yep, the game industry). Fable, as it turns out, is almost ready and in fine form. Good save! We had a cover. You can read all about it on page 50 of this issue.

You can also read, in both inbox and Xrated, about Capcom's disastrous *Steel Battalion: Line*—enabled follow up to its superb *Steel Battalion*. To cut a very long story short, it simply doesn't work. It's broken and may not be fixable (we'll have to wait and see whether a patch sorts things out). It's on shelves, and many of you have already bought it. So my question is: How did Capcom come to release a game in such a poor state of repair? And, for that matter, how did Microsoft—which closely vets all games published for Xbox—let them?

—Simon Cox, Editor-in-Chief



## Who's who on XBN

### SIMON COX

Bryan McGee  
Despite concerted efforts, editor Simon Cox has yet to fully win the staff of XBN Nelson off of "Pantless Friday." His other projects, notably "Desperation Tuesday" and "Bring Enriched Rationium To Work Day," have been resounding successes. He is like the artist, currently known as Prince for Elvis, but without all the rhinestone-covered suede jumpsuits and profuse sweating.

### ANDREW MENDOZA

Horacius Rockefeller  
A survivor of the Cola Wars, this decorated, associate art director Andrew Mendoza now spends his time in the pursuit of such manly arts as fisticuffs, tiger baiting, and puppy juggling. Whenever there is a mattress tag reading "Do Not Remove Under Penalty of Law," Mendoza will be there to see that justice, as ever, is upheld.

### EVAN SHAMOON

Rock Strongo  
Thirteen separate documentaries, most recently *Gengene Love and Are You Going To Eat That?* and one delightful animated show (*Even in the Exploitation*) have attempted to properly capture the phenomenon that is Evan Shamoon. He is currently hard at work on a children's pop-up book about the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. You had best not be eyeballing him.

### CINDY LUM

Princess Kashmir  
A 3D fighter among 2D side-scrollers, Cindy Lum runs at 60fps and includes a multiplayer cooperative mode where you can buy her lunch, obey her commands, and get your stuff in on time, as well as a competitive mode where she chases you with an ax that sort of magically appears from under her desk. Do not expect a bonus round; all collected coins go directly to Lum.

### DAVID CHEN

Bottomless Pete  
Dedicated newshound David Chen spends his time digging up scoops, interviewing sources, tracking down leads, and yelling for the damn copy boy. Some days he even wears a fedora with a "Press" card in its band. He cannot complete a sentence without first mentioning his Pulitzer Prize, which he won for his eight-part investigative series on the rise and fall of *Azucita: The Rise of Parachute*.

### ANDREW BURWELL

Lance Uppercott  
In any given day, art director Andrew Burwell punishes mimesis with a fist encased in titanium and buttocks with the unyielding strength and hardness of granite, and also ensures that Xbox Nation looks better by far than a Calcutta sewer smells. In case you were wondering, Burwell is the one who lets the dogs out—every Tuesday and Wednesday, just like clockwork.

### CHE CHOU

Max Power  
A magna cum laude graduate of the "he who small" school of existence, previews guy Che Chou family believes you can lump more suckers with a pillowcase filled with doorknobs than you can catch flies with honey. As one of the surviving Beatles (The Bootylicious One), Chou routinely has to tell Yoko Ono to cram it.

### GREG ORLANDO

Rembrandt G. Einstein  
A cretin trapped in a dudard's body, former Intercontinental Heavyweight Champion of the World Greg Orlando has not been seen since he suggested car Volttron was cooler than Ion Volttron. His last wish was that you remember him as the man who always braked for small children whenever he wasn't in too big of a hurry.

# XBN

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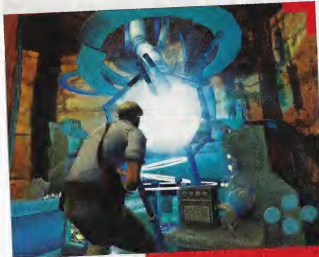
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# INBOX

LETTERS MAY 2004



## WRITE US:

As a member of the Xbox Nation, you too have a forum in which to share your voice. Send e-mail to [Xboxgaffdavis.com](mailto:Xboxgaffdavis.com) or drop us a postcard:

Xbox Nation  
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94105

Published letters may or may not be answered by a real human being...

## THE SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

Nowadays, everyone seems to be making either sequels or remakes of old-school games (*Ninja Gaiden*, *Doom 3*, *Half-Life 2*), but what about the really, REALLY fun games? *Carmageddon* comes to mind, along with *Lands of Lore*. I think they would be welcomed to the Xbox, especially *Lands of Lore*. We need a good adventure game. Andrew Carnuthers

XBN recommends *Broken Sword III: The Sleeping Dragon*, published by The Adventure Company. It wasn't so long ago that we said, "Players looking for an intelligent adventure will find few better Xbox titles than this." Strangely, XBN concurs with itself—even to this day.



## Strongly agree

So I opened my mailbox and saw a new XBN sitting complacently inside. I poked it up and felt the tough, glossy cover (marvelous), and then I remembered that there was to be a new look this month. Most magazines falter in this area—they can screw up the layout by making it too cluttered and fancy, or even worse, do silly things like enlarge the font size so their writers don't work as much.

I was glad to see that the reviews are just as in-depth as before, that there is room for more images than before, and that the color-coded sections are very well organized. And I love the backgrounds with the little dots—I've never seen that before, and it works extremely well. My best compliments to the Andrews of Art for making XBN look that much cooler and not extending you other guys' lunch break.

Toupee

## Strongly disagree

Don't get me wrong: XBN is still a fine magazine...but please don't act like the redesign is better. You all must know that from launch up to the current issue that XBN was a truly exceptional, fresh take on mainstream game magazine design (it was great magazine design, period). The art direction was impeccable, and conceptually you were so on your game...and now you're on the "gamer mag" game. You share so many stylistic cues with every other title out there that you've lost the sophistication. You've lost the fantastic layouts, your exceptional head font (what was that, by the way?), reversed copy, your well-conceived iconography, etc., et-fooken-cetera... Ah, well, it's a shame. Thank for the memories. The design is still good, it's just no longer great. That said (and I did have to say it), I absolutely appreciate the maturity and caliber of your writing. I just hope that's not the next thing to go.

Thx,  
Chris Aguirre

## Paranoia strikes!

Dear fellow slaves of the green X, it is me, or is there a conspiracy of little hands afoot? The Controller Sucks! has taken over! I fell in love with that huge, comfy controller the first time I ever had a chance to play an Xbox for an extended period. All those whiny morons didn't know what they were talking about

when they complained about the original controller. It is perfectly designed. My friends and I all agree. If you talk to anyone else except my inner circle, they seem to really like the Controller Sucks! Blasphemy! What is the consensus at XBN about this?

Yodayboy236

The XBN staff wasted precious time taking your Pepsi Challenge-style "taste" test, and the consensus was unanimous: The standard Xbox controller is as ungainly and unergonomic as ever.

## The tears of a clown

Shame on all of you. I get my new issue of XBN and lo and behold, what do I see in the calendar section, none other than the most anticipated games waiting to be released. After a good 20 minutes of searching for places to pre-order *Halo 2* before it's released, I notice a pattern of disagreements on the release dates. I go back to your mag to check again only to realize that—what?—all these great games are being released on the same day, none other than April 1. Now why does that day sound familiar? Oh yeah, maybe because that's APRIL FOOLS DAY!!!! That's a low blow. Shame on you. I hope you realize how low it is to print such lies. I truly feel hurt. I hope in time my wounds will mend and I actually will be able to play *Halo 2* ("shakes fist at you all")

Stephen Speer

Know, Stephen, that XBN's sense of shamelessness knows no bounds. Know also that some wounds will never, ever mend if not properly treated—even if we were to give you 20 minutes back to you. And finally, know that a copy of *Halo 2* (PS2 only) is waiting for you here at our offices.

## Spot the difference

Hi! I'm a new subscriber, and I noticed in the April issue on page 69 in "Playlist," there are two listings for *Dead or Alive*. What is the difference between DOA Cronus and DOA Ultimate? Please let me know. I'm a big DOA fan and I'm sure someone else would like to know.

Lawrence Jones

Cronus is not DOA online (that's DOA Ultimate), nor is it the next in the series of DOA fighting games, in the traditional sense. It's all a bit top-



# "I FELL IN LOVE WITH THAT HUGE, COMFY CONTROLLER THE FIRST TIME I EVER HAD A CHANCE TO PLAY AN XBOX..."

**XPRESS**

LETTERS

secret for now, but Tecmo seems to be indicating that *Cronus* is an entirely new game, closer to an adventure than a fighter but still featuring the *DOA* characters. Sounds pretty damn cool, actually.

## The power of persuasion

You weak-minded fools! I've Force-choked better than you! In your "The Essential 50 Xbox Games" article in issue 13, you've left out one of the top five Xbox titles—*Star Wars: KOTOR*. I couldn't believe my eyes, even after checking and rechecking again. I noticed that for this article you listed the games that scored the highest in your review ladder: all the 10s, all the 9s, and some 8s. In issue 12, you listed *KOTOR* as having received a 7, but I distinctly remember differently. It received a 9, not a 7.

[Force persuade] You will make amends to the legions of slighted *KOTOR* fans.

Emma Kreckon

No pulling wool over your eagle eyes, Emma. To make amends, maybe this *KOTOR* screenshot (and a corrected Top 50 list) will help you sleep a little

easier at night. Maybe not.

## Hal-uh-oh!

Yo, I'm just one of the many nitpicky, obsessive Halo fanboys (who isn't fat?) that are most likely writing you about Halo. In issue 13, in the helpful "Essential Selection" article, you said that Halo was developed by Electronic Arts Canada and published by Electronic Arts. Of course it was developed by Bungie, published by Microsoft, blah, blah, blah. You get the point. Thanks for the great mag!

Matt Sayer  
Mintz08

Not fat, eh? Then you haven't been playing enough Halo, obviously. Or eating enough pies. But you have been paying attention. We'd like to say that the error was an April Fools' joke designed precisely for observant types like yourself to pick up on, write to us about, and then receive some sort of impressive prize for your efforts. A vacation package to the Bahamas, for example. Or a Vegas bring-your-own-rings party with Britney Spears. But we can't, because it was a screw up. //

## One for posterity

Dear Xbox crew,  
Any chance that you will include pullout posters and such? That new cover with the Clone Troopers was hot. I want one on my wall.

Fabian L. Marino

Yes, yes, and yes, Fabian. *XBN 13* included a poster featuring *Hitman: Contracts*. Agent 47, this ish features the infamous Baraka of *Mortal Kombat*. And as for those Clone Troopers, keep on checking your issues each month...



## OMISSIONS!

Whoops! Fans of *NFL Street* will surely have noticed that a slew of promised codes for EA Big's rough 'n' tumble pigskin sim...weren't there. Chalk it up to April Issue Fools—or, well, anyway, here they are, en todo...

### Unlockable Teams

To unlock these secret teams, simply start a new game, type your user name in as one of the following codes (which are case-sensitive), then start a Quick Game and choose that name to access the team you want. Yes, that does mean these codes only work in this game mode. User Name: Team

AE3278: AFC East All-Star Team  
AN6789: AFC North All-Star Team  
AS6884: AFC South All-Star Team  
AW9378: AFC West All-Star Team  
NE3278: NFC East All-Star Team  
NN6789: NFC North All-Star Team  
NS9378: NFC South All-Star Team  
NW9378: NFC West All-Star Team

### Travel All Stadiums

nw9378: NFC West teams  
as76884: NFC West and AFC South teams  
nn6789: NFC West and AFC South and NFC North teams  
KaySlay: Team Kay Slay  
Classic: NFL Legends team  
Excellent: Team Executioner

Look at me, damn it! You're still thinking about "her," aren't you?



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# XPRESS

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THE ABILITY TO TAKE A CUSTOM FIGHTER, LEARN NEW STYLES AND MOVES, AND THEN USE THEM ON XBOX LIVE REALLY HAS OUR PANTS ABLAZE.

# THE FIGHT IS ON...

Looking for a fight? Then look no further...

▲ A little over a decade ago, *Mortal Kombat* shocked the world. At the dawn of technology capable of rendering graphics that almost sort of resembled a realistic human being, the copious amounts of blood and easily detachable spinal columns featured in Midway's 2D brawler ushered in the era of ESRB ratings and congressional hearings, and introduced the rest of the country to Senator Joe Lieberman.

But a funny thing happened in the last 10 years: Everyone got used to it. The blood-and-guts approach, having survived the initial wave of government scrutiny, was taken by pretty much every game company that wasn't named "Nintendo," and death, despair, and dismemberment became popular themes in digital entertainment. The shock value of spine removal wore off, and with the *Soul Calibur*, *Virtua Fighters*, and *Tekken*s of the world offering a technically superior experience, the *Mortal Kombat* franchise found itself searching for relevance.

In 2002, Midway released *Mortal Kombat: Dark Alliance*, which kept most of the classic MK elements and feel while the fighting engine was completely reworked to accommodate three dimensions. *Dark Alliance* was a large step forward for the franchise, and its strong sales performance proved that the MK fanbase was still alive and kicking. This is the basis for *Mortal Kombat: Deception*, the sixth proper game in the series, and the highest-profile fighting game in development for the Xbox.

Occurring after the events of *Dark Alliance*, *Deception* aims to keep a good thing going. A revamped Konquest mode—the hero-in-laced meat and potatoes of *Dark Alliance*—ups the addiction factor. You begin by creating a custom character

on the framework of a 13-year-old apprentice. Your goal as this young combatant is to journey throughout the six realms in search of those who can teach you new fighting stances (up to three unique styles can be learned). If the phrase "journeying throughout realms" seems out of place in the description of a fighting game, consider it proof positive that *Deception* is shaping up to be quite unlike most other fighters.

This adventure-RPG aspect of the game seems interesting enough, but the ability to take a custom fighter, learn new styles and moves, and then use him or her (or it) on Xbox Live against others really has our pants ablaze. Also playable online are two minigames: a chess-style game in which pieces are captured after a regular *Mortal Kombat*-style melee, and a puzzle mode akin to Capcom's brilliant *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*. *Mortal Monday* may once again be worth marking on our calendars.

But of course, not everyone likes *Mortal Kombat*'s blood-spattered brand of brawling. Here's a quick rundown of the rest of this year's Xbox fighter crop:

## ► DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE

Now that *Ninja Gaiden* is a wrap, Itagaki-san can get back to work on this double-pack of *Dead or Alive* and *Dead or Alive 2*: the former a perfect port of the Sega Saturn version that was never released Stateside, and the latter sexed up with the *Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball* graphics engine. And both feature online play over Live.

## ► CAPCOM VS. SNK: SVC CHAOS

Originally released last year for the Japanese PS2 and the NeoGeo (yes, it's still around—but not for long, see page 19)



for details), a port of the latest tag-team between Capcom and SNK is scheduled for sometime in September.

## ► KING OF FIGHTERS 2002

Arriving a mere two years late, *King of Fighters 2002* is currently scheduled for a release later this fall...in 2004. As with most iterations of KOF, it'll be worth checking out, but something really needs to be done about that title.

## ► FIGHT CLUB

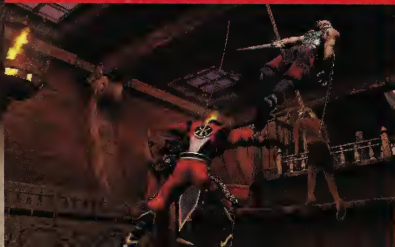
Recently unveiled, *Fight Club* promises "story elements true to the *Fight Club* movie," so one speculates about minigames based on pouring lye on hands, and Tyler riding around the house on his bicycle. For a first look, dig in to "Urban Decay" on page 64.

## ► IRON PHOENIX

Developed by the recently industrious Sammy Studios, *Iron Phoenix* is set to support up to 16 players battling for fortune and glory over Xbox Live. Turn to page 23 for a closer look.

## ► JADE EMPIRE

Why the puzzled look? Just because it's a BioWare RPG doesn't mean that it can't have some sort of fighting engine...and that's what the word on the street is. For the word of the creators, try page 38.







## PARIAH

Unreal, unbeatable, and untouchable

**Doom, Unreal, Quake, Halo.** Just when you thought the single-word first-person shooter naming craze had ended—thank God for sequels—Digital Extremes unwrapped its newest title, *Pariah*. And like those memorably titled predecessors, *Pariah* looks set to warm up the genre.

The best way to make a good first impression is to wow with graphics, and *Pariah* does just that. Even though the inspirations are instantly familiar—think *Halo* and *Unreal* meet *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* and *Titan*—Digital Extremes could hardly have picked better ideas to pinch. Futuristic architecture mixes fluidly with Unreal-style use of nature, lights, shadows, and elemental effects, while character models look more than a little like Square's Aki Ross and Troy Edwards. No one's complaining: everyone always loves spaceships with light-trail engines.

Digital Extremes hasn't made a bad game yet, and that's saying something. From *Unreal Tournament* to *Unreal Championship* and even that 3D Adventure Pinball game, the Canada-based developer has a solid track record and sure knows how to push Epic Games' Unreal engine. So it's no disappointment that *Pariah* follows mostly the same path, relying on the latest Unreal technology to guarantee that its detailed visuals and intense action are accompanied by smooth framerate.

*Pariah* is billed as a first-person action-shooter with a "robust, immersive story

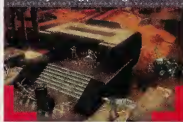
line" and "survival elements," which typically means that there will be plenty of in-game chatter and a need to manage health and ammo. Early info hints that *Halo*-style vehicles and scripted events will enhance the free-roaming, team-based combat.

As it stands, *Pariah*'s pretty close to a sure thing. Digital Extremes has a great track record, plenty of experience with the Unreal engine, and no need to dumb down the game's content to PS2 or GameCube limitations—*Pariah* is exclusive to Xbox and PC. And come E3, XBN will surely have even more to say about it. //

More info at: [www.digitalextremes.com](http://www.digitalextremes.com)

### UNDER THE HOOD

*Pariah* uses a highly modified version of the Unreal Championship engine and integrates aspects of the tech that powers the soon-to-be-released *Unreal Tournament 2004*. From physics to lighting, *Pariah* is already looking promising.



## ASK ITAGAKI!

TECMO'S HEAD NINJA ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS!

**Q:** I love videogames, but my girlfriend does not. What can I do to get her interested in games?

**A:** Have the woman try one of the games I have made. DOA3 should suffice. If she does not find it interesting after playing for 5 minutes, give up on her. Nothing else you do will make a difference.

**Q:** What videogames are you playing right now?

**A:** Right now, *Pokémon*.

**Q:** If you could have any superpower, what would it be?

**A:** Teleportation of course! I have no need to see the future.

**Q:** I have a huge crush on this girl in my office, but it seems that so does everyone else here. What can I do to make myself stand out from the rest of the pack? Also, she's married...

**A:** Shut up and get back to work!

**Q:** If you could turn a movie into a game, what movie would you choose?

**A:** I would have to say *The Godfather*. The world that the director has created in that movie is fantastic. Shall I make it something along the lines of GTA? Also, I think a *Slaughterhouse Five* game would be interesting. Of course, that's a novel, not a movie.

**Q:** Who would win in a fight: Kasumi or (K-1 fighter) Bob Sapp?

**A:** No offense to Bob, but he wouldn't last 5 seconds!

**Q:** You've resurrected *Ninja Gaiden*—will you do the same for *Tecmo Bowl*?

**A:** Oh yeah, I would really like to do that. It would be further down the line, though.

**Q:** What is the strangest question you like to ask potential new hires?

**A:** "OK, you have five minutes. Try to say something that will piss me off." //

Tecmo's Tomonobu Itagaki is not a licensed therapist, nor does he have a degree in psychiatry. Have a question for Mr. Itagaki? Just e-mail us at [XBN@ziffdavis.com](mailto:XBN@ziffdavis.com).

### Who's Groove?

*Pariah* publisher Groove Games is a newcomer to the Xbox world, having primarily worked on PC titles, including *Western Outlaw*, *Sno Cross Extreme*, *Devastation*, *Incoming Forces*, and *Playboy Mansion*.



## HIGH ROLLERBALL

DICE plays Sin City

Las Vegas played host to the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences' seventh annual DICE (Design, Innovate, Communicate, Entertain) Summit, with the Palms Casino Hotel serving as ground zero for the event.

Held in early March, DICE brought together videogame behemoths such as designer Peter Molyneux, Electronic Arts' cofounder Bing Gordon, Prince of Persia's creator Jordan Mechner, and various PR flacks, gaming marketing executives, and assorted hangers-on for three days of lectures, self-congratulations, awards, and, of course, debauchery.

Convention lectures included such topics as "Designing Games for Next-Generation Machines," "Targeting Tomorrow's Consumer Today," and "Rewarding Your Players, Or, Why Carrots Are Better Than Sticks." While the talks ran the gamut from the genuinely informative to the downright self-serving—as demonstrated by "The Wired Home" presentation given by Wired magazine's top editor, Chris Anderson—to the genuinely revelatory, the list of speakers, which included Molyneux, WarCraft guru and CEO of Flagship Studios, Bill Roper, and EA's other cofounder, Trip Hawkins, was certainly unimpeachable.

Thirty-six categories for PC and console games were established for the Academy's Seventh Annual Interactive Achievement Awards. Academy members voted to decide the winner in each category, and Activision's PC hit *Call of Duty* walked away with the top prize, Game of the Year. Ubisoft's *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* won Console Game of the Year, and Microsoft's Xbox-exclusive *Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge* netted the award for Console Action/Adventure Game of the Year. Other Xbox titles that were recognized for their excellence include *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (Console Role-Playing Game of the Year) and *Soul Calibur II* (Console Fighting Game of the Year). //

More info at: [www.interactive.org/DICE](http://www.interactive.org/DICE)



The Prince of Persia team, dangerously close to aligning all nine Ornaments of Ultimate Power and blowing the roof off the building.

Inner Dimensions  
2D or not 2D...SNK has the answers

When Microsoft first arrived on the console scene, the industry was undergoing a macabre cleansing operation. Developers were forced to convert to 3D development or not only risk public dismissal, but also disapproval from Sony. Without Sony's approval, many games went unpublished. This policy—crushing to small studios—continues today.

Even so, some studios refuse to surrender. Venerable developer SNK has been through hell and has returned stronger and more determined to make a difference. "Gameplay 2D max!" exclaims SNK NeoGeo USA Consumer Corporation President Ben Herman. Now, thanks to the efforts of SNK Playmore and Guilty Gear series publisher Sammy, 2D games are on the verge of a rebirth.

At the AOU Expo in February, SNK announced the retirement of the venerable NeoGeo format in favor of Sammy's comparably powerful Atomiswave platform. "We've worked with the NeoGeo for 13 years," says Playmore Development Chief Kazuya Hirata. "There have been talks in the past about when we'll stop supporting the NeoGeo, but this is going to be the real end." SNK Playmore President Koichi Toyama also revealed that SNK will devote more attention to the

consumer market than it has in the past.

With this shift, the Atomiswave—already a promising system—leaps to the top of the arcade pack. As with NeoGeo, Atomiswave is an inexpensive cartridge-based system that will soon be a modern haven for 2D development. Between SNK and Sammy alone, this year will see *The King of Fighters NeoWave*, *The King of Fighters 2004*, *Metal Slug 6*, *Samurai Shodown AW*, *Sammy vs. Capcom*, *Guilty Gear Isuka*, and *Dimp's* original *Fighter The Rumblefish*.

In part thanks to Sony's policies, Xbox may well benefit from this growth. Since SCEA has held the PS2 release of SNK's *Metal Slug 3* in limbo for a year, SNK will publish it exclusively for Xbox in North America. Also confirmed are *The King of Fighters 2004* and *SNK vs. Capcom: SVC Chaos*. *SVC Chaos* and *Guilty Gear* will support Xbox Live, while online features for *MS3* are undecided as of now.

With this pending support from SNK and Sammy, Microsoft might just be in a position to reverse some of Sony's biggest mistakes. Herman freely admits that Microsoft has been "much more receptive" to SNK's plans. If Microsoft can transform Xbox into a public sanctuary for embattled designers and put its muscle toward bringing attention to views that Sony would stigmatize, it might well serve a role that to date has yet to be filled. //

More info at: [www.snkneogeousa.com](http://www.snkneogeousa.com)

## HALL O' FAME

Fabled game designer lauded for achievements

Famed games designer Peter Molyneux (*Black & White*, *Populous*, the forthcoming *Fable*) became the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences' seventh Hall of Fame inductee at DICE. Molyneux,

who gave a talk titled "The Next Step for the Games Industry From a Designer's Perspective," joined game luminaries Yu Suzuki, Will Wright, John Carmack, Hidemitsu Sakaguchi, Sid Meier, and Shigeru Miyamoto as an honored Hall member.

## DANNY'S STORY

Fabled Elf-man to make music magic

Award winner, former front man for '80s band Oingo Boingo, and Simpsons theme-song composer Danny Elfman has signed on to compose theme music for Microsoft's forthcoming *Fable*.

Elfman has graced the soundtracks of such popular films as *Chicago*, *Batman III*, *Die Darkman*, *Die*, and *Nightmare Before Christmas*, and has composed the themes for the *Simpsons*: *Hill and Run* and *Simpsons Road Rage* games.

## DISTANT TEARS

The Ball is back in (Tinseltown)

The great despising of planet Earth's videogames continues unabated as yet another piece of electronic

entertainment—this time Ubisoft's *Far Cry*—prepares to receive hack film director Uwe Boll's searing, most likely anally invasive kiss. Hell vomits its chunk-laden fury when *Far Cry: The Movie* sees release in 2005.

## News Bits

Tidbits of news for you and me.



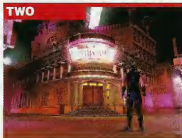


## TOP 10: XBOX BEST-SELLERS (AS OF MAR. 2004)



### 007: Everything or Nothing

Live: No Release: 02/04 Score: Eight  
What we said: "In short, *Nothing* looks, sounds, and feels like *Bond*. Mission accomplished."



### Ninja Gaiden

Live: Yes Release: 03/04 Score: Nine  
What we said: "If *Gaiden* isn't a perfect action game, it's pretty damn close."



### Unreal II: The Awakening

Live: Yes Release: 02/04 Score: Seven  
What we said: "...dreadfully boring, full of genre clichés and pointless firefights."

### FOUR

#### Halo

Live: No  
Release: 11/01  
Score: Ten  
What we said: "*Halo* is, quite simply, the closest thing we have experienced to a living, breathing alternate universe."

### FIVE

#### NFL Street

Live: No  
Release: 11/02  
Score: Seven  
What we said: "...life with enough sass, fancy footwork, and trash talk to fill the post-Super Bowl void."

### SIX

#### MX Unleashed

Live: No  
Release: 02/04  
Score: Seven  
What we said: "Even if you're not a believer in pain or a big motocross fan, this might make you one."

### SEVEN

#### Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II

Live: No  
Release: 11/04  
Score: Seven  
What 1UP.com said: "...a decent sequel and worthy competition for...*Norrath*."

### EIGHT

#### GTA Double Pack

Live: No  
Release: 11/03  
Score: Ten  
What we said: "Both games (*GTA3* and *Vice City*) stand as simple marvels for the freedom they present to players."

### NINE

#### Sonic Heroes

Live: No  
Release: 01/04  
Score: Eight  
What we said: "In classic *Sonic* fashion, *Heroes* looks spectacular... offers a return to classic *Sonic* form."

### TEN

#### Need for Speed Underground

Live: No  
Release: 11/03  
Score: Nine  
What we said: "Where the game really shows its colors is in the level of customization..."

## FAME...OR SHAME?



### Ninja Gaiden

Live: Yes Release: 03/04 Score: Nine  
Niggling complaints aside, *Ninja Gaiden* succeeds and surpasses in almost every department. An Xbox must-have.

### Steel Battalion: LOC

Live: Yes Release: 03/04 Score: Three  
It should have been gamer's heaven, but *Line of Contact* proves that war—even when fought with robots—is indeed hell.

## TOP 10 U.K.

First cock-a-leekie soup. Now this...

### 1 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

Girls, guns, gadgetry.

### 2 DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

On: The Great War to End All Invisible Wars.

### 3 GTA: DOUBLE PACK

It's two great tastes in one.

### 4 SONIC HEROES

We could be heroes.

### 5 PRINCE OF PERSIA: TSOT

"There will be time," says T.S. Elliot.

### 6 PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

Gotham City needs an enemy? Hardly...

### 7 TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL

Splinter Cell today, Pandora Tomorrow...

### 8 MORROWIND: GOTY EDITION

Break like the *Morrowind*.

### 9 FIFA 2004

It's like football for Europeans.

### 10 MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES

Everything old is still old. But fun.

## TOP 10 JAPAN

The real list got lost in translation.

### 1 STEEL BATTALION: LOC

Mech believe you can log on to this.

### 2 AMPED 2

Like *Juiced* for snowboarding.

### 3 BREAKDOWN

Our 19th nervous, to be exact.

### 4 DEAD OR ALIVE 3

Keep abreast of the competition.

### 5 PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

Where the cars drive you!

### 6 DOA: XTREME BEACH V-BALL

Breast of the best.

### 7 HALO

A classic on any continent.

### 8 O-TO-G: HYAKKI TOBATSU EMAKI

Happy Fortune kiffest.

### 9 GENMA ANIMUSHA

Domu arigato, Mr. Robot.

### 10 UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Shoot monsters in the face.

Numbers courtesy of Media Create [m-crea.co.jp]

REC

30 03

11:09:37

78

"THE MOST IMPORTANT VIDEO GAME  
OF THE LAST FIVE YEARS."

- THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

# MANHUNT

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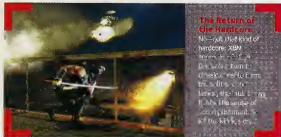
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## TRENDSPOTTING

Trends we like, and some we don't

➤ Here's Trendspotting, your handy guide to what's hot—and what's not—in games today. From new ideas and

technologies to misguided marketing and everything in between, XBN separates the cream from the crap.

**The Return of the Hardcore**

Microsoft's Halo 2 is the latest of a new breed of hardcore Xbox games. It's a first-person shooter with a focus on strategy, the kind of thing that used to be the domain of PC gamers. Halo 2 is a game that's not just for the hardcore, but for the hardcore.

**Midway Back on Track Again**

Midway's recent success with the game Tekken 5 has led to a resurgence in the company's fortunes. The company is now back on track, and its stock price is up. This is a good sign for the company, and it's a good sign for the industry.

**That '70s War**

War games are back, and they're better than ever. The new wave of war games is more realistic than ever, and they're more fun than ever. This is a good sign for the industry, and it's a good sign for the players.

**The Death of the Cool**

Microsoft's Xbox is the most successful console in the world. It's a success story that's been written in the stars. The Xbox is a console that's not just for the hardcore, but for the hardcore.

**No More Xbox**

Microsoft's Xbox is the most successful console in the world. It's a success story that's been written in the stars. The Xbox is a console that's not just for the hardcore, but for the hardcore.

XPANSION:  
GET MORE FROM YOUR XBOX

Most of the time, Xpansion will focus on pushing current Xbox technology, but this recent story regarding Xbox Next technology was simply too interesting to ignore...

Microsoft's firing of Michael Hanscom because of a blog posting he made was big news last year. Apple Macintosh fan Hanscom photographed pallets full of dual-processor G5 Macs being delivered to Microsoft and blogged to a tiny audience. "Even Microsoft wants G5s." Citing security concerns, Microsoft dismissed Hanscom, creating front-page newspaper and Web stories in the process. But no one knew where the G5s were going.

It looks like they were headed—temporarily—to the Xbox Next development labs. XBN reported last issue that the new Xbox will use three 64-bit processors like those in Apple's recent Macs, courtesy of Microsoft's deal with PowerPC CPU developer IBM. And shortly after XBN went to press, Microsoft quietly shipped key Xbox developers newly customized Apple G5 computers—running Windows NT, not Mac OS X—for use as Xbox Next development systems.

But don't expect Xbox Next consoles to display Apple logos or run Mac-quality games; Microsoft has bigger plans. Run a Google search for "DirectX Slides from Melttdown 2003" and download slides about DirectX Next, the graphics software behind the new Xbox. (Start at slide 19 of Future Features.) Better color and shadows, higher resolutions, and smoother animation and framerates are all on tap. And keep looking for specification



**Jeremy Horwitz**  
Writer  
Orange County, CA

announcements for ATI's R500 chip, the video hardware likely to power Xbox Next. You know XBN will.

**Jeremy Horwitz**

MORE CHIPS,  
LESS EXTRAS

New chips have squeezed out old Xbox features. So what's been dropped?

**Hard Disk:** Flash-memory maker M-Systems claims Microsoft has dumped disks in favor of solid-state storage. Microsoft says: "Speculation."

**Nvidia Chips:** Nvidia owns some Xbox chip rights, including proprietary audio and video functions, and says they won't be in Xbox Next.

**Old Xbox Games:** No hard drive and no Nvidia probably mean no old Xbox games on Next, without an emulator.





# GOT MODS?

We dream of DreamX...

While the idea of "modding" a console system isn't anything new, Taiwan-based FriendTech is hoping to make the process more user-friendly by doing the job for you. Known primarily for its PC upgrade kits, FriendTech recently started shipping two versions of modified Xboxes, the DreamX-1480 and the DreamX-733. The company is claiming that these two units offer more than just larger-capacity hard drives and region-free DVD playback—according to press materials, they even make your games perform better.

XBN recently got its mitts on FriendTech's flagship machine, the DreamX-1480, and put it to the test. At \$499 (steep, admittedly), the DreamX-1480 does boast some significant hardware upgrades compared with a standard Xbox. The DreamX-1480 rocks a 1.4GHz Intel processor, 128MB of RAM, and a 120GB hard drive. A stock Xbox has a 733MHz Intel Pentium III processor, 64MB of RAM, and an 8GB hard drive. The 1480 is not a machine for the faint of heart.

The uninformed will immediately inquire as to why an Xbox even needs a hard drive of that size. To which FriendTech is quick to mention that it sees its highly modified Xboxes as potential "home media and game centers"—not unlike Sony's PSX. The DreamX-1480 works via Xbox's Ethernet port: Simply plug it in to any existing network and you can FTP files to DreamX's hard drive. For instance, we FTP'd a ton of WMA music files to it and were able to play the songs via Xbox's Media Player application—whose interface, in fact, is remarkably reminiscent of that of a media center PC.

The DreamX-1480 also boasts a turbo switch, which enables you to boost performance during gameplay. We played Halo, as well as Need for Speed Underground, and other than experiencing shorter load times, we honestly had a difficult time discerning any significant differences during typical scenarios. Those occasional instances involving serious freights with dozens of enemies, however, didn't yield the kind of framerate hits that we've come to expect—and depending on how hardcore you think you are, this could be a really big deal. There's just one caveat here, and it's quite a big one: The DreamX-1480 doesn't support Xbox Live, so if gaining the online upper hand is important to you, don't expect this beast to do your dirty work for you. //

More info at: [www.friendtech.com](http://www.friendtech.com)

## There's always room for friends...

Paul Hu is a busy man. He's not only the sales director for FriendTech—a leading supplier of PC CPU upgrades with offices in the U.S., China, and Taiwan—he's also a customer. XBN snagged some time to pop a few Qs...



**XBN:**

First things first:

What's the deal with Xbox in Taiwan?

**PH:** Microsoft did a good job in Taiwan and Korea for the Xbox console promotion. However, the Sony PS2 is still ahead of every body in the local market.

**XBN:** How long does each DreamX unit take to make, and why?

**PH:** It takes about a week to make each.

**XBN:** FriendTech does a lot more than modify Xboxes—how do you see game consoles fitting into your future plans?

**PH:** We feel the console serves best as a

home media and game center, like the PSX from Sony. Imagine if Sony were able to add these features to your console: wireless LAN, DWR, USB 2.0 or firewire ports for 5.1 MP3/HLS cards, SAE/DVD-Audio playback, CD and digital TV-STA. Console are cheap and easy to operate, this is where PCs beat consoles.

**XBN:** Why did you choose the Xbox?

**PH:** The Xbox is basically a PC, so we're familiar with its Xbox architecture. The difficult part is Microsoft's attitude towards licensing. We could make the DreamX enhanced with the GeForce 4400 64 FX and ATI Radeon 9800 3D VEGA if they were willing to work with us. I believe it's the right way for them to make the Xbox more open to gamers and game developers. This could improve market share compared to the PS2.

**XBN:** Production has just begun on the DreamX, but how are sales so far?

**PH:** The DreamX is for the niche market of gamers, so sales won't be significant. One thing is for sure: The DreamX will be a collector's item—less is more.

**XBN:** Is a more powerful model planned?

**PH:** Yes, a flagship model will be introduced in limited quantities in Q4 2004.

**XBN:** Who is your target audience?

**PH:** Most of our sales are in the United States and UK. The DreamX-1480 gives you a thrill, fun, and excitement that surpasses all other Xboxes on the planet. We don't know about other planets.

## News Bits

Tidbits of news for you and me

### CDV Detoxes

Swedish company canes two titles

CDV Software Entertainment has officially canceled two upcoming Xbox titles, *Psychotactics* and *The Koro Gang*, the latter of which was featured in XBN issue #8. CDV reported

that 2003 saw unscheduled write-offs of EUR 3.2 million for the three months ending the year on top of news that the company is expecting a realistic loss of EUR 10 million.



### Granddad Auto?

Long-running rumor confirmed by EA

EA's chief financial officer confirmed that the company is developing a game based on Francis Ford Coppola's critically acclaimed *Godfather* trilogy. The potential significance is considerable: When

released, the game—which will likely be M-rated—will mark a change in strategy for EA, which has traditionally distanced itself from such fare.

Details including gameplay specifics, voice talent, and a release date have yet to be revealed.

### Seven's Eleven

Konami Europe reads a Winning combination

Recently quiet on the Xbox front, Konami is porting one of its most popular series—in Europe at least—and legends of football fans could follow. Winning Eleven 7

(released here on PS2 as *World Soccer Winning Eleven 7*) will release as *Pro Evolution Soccer for Xbox* in Europe by year's end; no plans for a U.S. release have been announced yet.





# IRON PHOENIX

## Majestic bird...or burnt turkey?

Sammy Studios proclaimed the online fighter *Iron Phoenix* to be the herald of a new genre, a 3D fighter that merges weapons-based combat with elements of team-based shooters. Upon seeing the game in action as played by 16 Sammy employees during the company's gamers' day press event, a few journalistic wits remarked that someone had replaced the iron with tinfoil.

Still early in its development, *Phoenix*'s hook is its online team-based play for as many as 16 would-be martial artists. In multiplayer mode, fighters race through huge environments, searching for enemies to kill while collecting nine special weapons. The weapons all have a unique fighting style attributed to them, and when a combatant—of which there will be approximately 10

different male and female characters—changes weapons, he also changes the way he attacks and defends.

In motion, the game's generic brawlers climbed on walls and, after employing special chi powers, dashed superquick around enemies and glided through the air. A brief playtest confirmed players' initial suspicions as to *Phoenix*'s shortcomings: The game's fairly large environments seemed to hinder the action, since fighters actually had to hunt down other players to brawl with them. Once combat was met, the game seemed little more than a button-mashing extravaganza set in an overlarge, ancient Chinese-themed stone courtyard.

Sammy gambled by showing the game early and—in XBN's opinion—lost. The hope is that developer InterServ steps up to the challenge and adds both iron and blood to the package. *Phoenix* will be fleshed out with a single-player mode and is scheduled for release this holiday season. //

More info at:

[www.sammystudios.com](http://www.sammystudios.com)



### News Bits

Tidbits of news for you and me



### MAD MAX REDUX

**Tormented Cop To Get Back on Beat** Flatfooted vigilantes rejoice, a third *Mad Max* game is on the way. Speaking at the Bear Stearns media conference, Take-Two interactive (parent company to Rockstar Games) CEO Jeffrey Kaplan confirmed that a third installment in Remedy Entertainment's gritty crime drama is in the works. Kaplan also stated that it might be two years before the game ships. Which—in bullet time or otherwise—is a pretty long time. Xbox Next, then?

### BACK IN BLACK

**Or: Black is the new black** Last month's news—that Brick-based developer Criterion Games was unleashing a third Burnout game (courtesy of EA here in the States)—was enough to keep XBN up all night. The

studio has also recently announced *Black* for Xbox, an all-new FPS involving antiterrorism, covert ops, global instability, and intrigue. Plot information, gameplay details, and other salient specifics have yet to be revealed. *Black* ships in 2005.

### VIRTU-ART

**Giving the gallery treatment** The Electronic Arts & Entertainment Expo, in celebration of its 10th anniversary, recently announced an open call for entries for "Into the Pixel," a juried exhibition of game art. The exhibit is a

joint project between EA, the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences, and the Graphic Arts Council of the L.A. County Museum of Art. The show—which will be held at the LACC—will be open to all E3 attendees, as well as the general public.



REASONS TO GO

TO 1UP.COM...

because...

... with XBN coming out every month you'll need somewhere to go to keep track of all the new things going on... because... you cleaned out your room and all your old XBN issues are gone... because... Che needs to be told on the message boards that his review of Sega GT Online was just wrong... because... your Xbox game library needs a serious overhaul and need another opinion on Xbox gaming.

Bookmark XBN's new homepage.

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**ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA**  
GAME GROUP

# MTV MUSIC GENERATOR 3

This is the remix

Maybe it's the lazy bastard in us, but there's something oddly compelling about the proposition of producing music from the sofa. With a new, streamlined interface and real-time sound processing capabilities, MTV Music Generator 3 is the most accessible music-creation program XBN has seen on a console.

After "creative differences," Codemasters ditched the developers of the prior Generator games, indeed, replacing them with developer MixMax has resulted in a significantly different product. Where prior versions used a difficult mixer metaphor as an interface, the new game uses more

traditional menus and sequencer windows, making it decidedly less intimidating for the rookie producer. Essentially, Generator provides the bare minimum of production tools: a six-second sampler, along with a simple drum machine, pattern sequencer, and effects. But given the limitless nature of even bare-bones electronic music production, the possibilities here are quite endless. As a starting point, the game includes 10 fully remixable tracks from the likes of Outkast, Snoop Dogg, Sean Paul, Fabolous, and Carl Cox, which you can take apart, add effects to, and reorganize to your heart's content. Here are the basics of how it works...



## SAMPLER: Any CD you own

Generator allows you to store up to 20 eight-second music clips, which can be incorporated into your songs. This is where the Xbox version really shines: Samples are stored on the Xbox hard drive, so any time you load up your saved song, you can immediately play it—complete with samples. On PS2, once you turn off your console, the samples are gone—if you've saved your song, the game will essentially bookmark where the sample is stored on your CD. What a pain.



## DRUM MACHINE/SYNTH: Boom!

Music Generator 3 features 4,000 built-in sound samples or loops, if you'd rather march to your own beat, however, you can create your own drum tracks using the included beat box, or use the piano to compose your own melodies. These user-created samples can then be incorporated into any of the included songs or one that you've made yourself. Essentially, you're given up to six tracks to play around with—one track can be the bass drum, one can be the kick, etc.



## SEQUENCER: The megamix

The sequencer allows up to 24 unique tracks with 512 bars of music (which equates to a maximum of roughly 15 minutes for a song). The individual tracks are represented as color-coded bars, and the interface is refreshingly simple. Tracks and effects can even be altered on the fly. For \$29.99, you could become the next Dizee Rascal—the UK MC and producer reportedly created three of the tracks on his Mercury Prize-winning album *Boy in da Corner* using Generator 2.



## EFFECTS: Dynamics galore

Generator 3's built-in effects include Pan, Filter, Reverb, Delay, Flanger, Distort, and Reverse, allowing for an impressive assortment of aural enhancements. Especially impressive is that these effects can change over time; if you want your reverb to rise and crescendo at 1:42 just as the track pans from the left stereo channel to the right, it can. Simple—but infinitely useful.

# EYE...GOLDENEYE

Good is good, but bad is soooo much better...

Fresh from the success of its 007: Everything or Nothing, EA's made public a few details about the next Bond game—currently dubbed *GoldenEye 2*—which is due this fall. Other than the first person perspective, however, this sequel-in-spirit should prove to be quite a different experience. For a change, players won't be Bond, becoming instead "the ultimate villain in the Bond universe" in this case a disgruntled ex-00 candidate



recruited by Auric Goldfinger in an effort to—what was it again? Ah, yes—rule the world. Players will lounge about in secret volcanic hideouts, flirt with an array of sultry she-spies, and cause all sorts of malicious mayhem. XBN expects EA to pull out all the stops to ensure *Eye 2* maintains the multiplayer magic that N64 owners gush about to this day. Sadly, XBN also expects Xbox owners to do a collective freak-out on hearing that *GoldenEye 2* won't support Live play.







# FINAL EXAM: BREAK

Part postmortem, part making-of: Final eXam gets under the skin of the first great first-person game out of Japan...

**Derrick Cole**—hero of the inexplicably intricate, emotionally compelling brawler *Breakdown*—does not exist. But Xbox owners willing to spend a few hours in his head know this: Whether or not Cole's world is real, they have been there. In a time when even the most superlative titles are expanding primarily on the "5" aspect of the FPS genre, *Breakdown* turns it on its head. Here—in the team's own words—is how it happened...

## Labor pains

Hirofumi Kami, *Breakdown*'s producer, obliged XBN by starting from the beginning: "We chose a first-person view because [it] allows us to give the player the most realistic, exciting game experience. Our main objective was to create a realistic gaming experience for the player. We first tried putting a camera on top of the model's head in order to portray a true first-person perspective. We let the model eat and pick up objects in his hands. We even have some clips of characters eating with a knife and fork and smoking a cigarette! It was a new and valuable experience, and we haven't seen such a view in any other games or movies."

"We [then] researched the best way to re-create depth. If things are far away from you, they will become small, like beans. If they are close to you, they will fill the screen. This dynamic vision is

characteristic of how real eyes see. We thought that we could best use this effect when fighting at close range, so enemies are right in your face. We decided to use fighting as a main mechanic in the game, not to use any movies or pre-rendered cut-scenes, and to let the player control the main character at all times. We felt that a third-person perspective could ruin the feeling of immersion."

## In the mood

After close-quarters combat was settled upon as the primary action element, the team moved on to how to handle a problem that's long stymied developers: compelling hand-to-hand action as seen

from the eyes of an avatar. Kami explains, "Fighting requires more movement than shooting does. For example, the player can't see what is going on when he executes a spin kick because it is such a large movement. It was also difficult to judge distances, making it very hard to tell if you are able to punch the enemy or not."

The solution, to no one's surprise, required plenty of trials, errors, and a lot of patience. "We solved these problems using trial and error," Kami says. "We created a CG model of Derrick and put the camera on top of his head. However, the captured motions were not quite what we wanted—the camera couldn't capture the fine arm movements, such as picking up

**"IF THINGS ARE FAR AWAY FROM YOU, THEY WILL BECOME SMALL, LIKE BEANS. IF THEY ARE CLOSE, THEY WILL FILL THE SCREEN. THIS IS HOW REAL EYES SEE."**

**—HIROFUMI KAMI, NAMCO**





# DOWN

objects or hitting someone. Then we adjusted the angles of the arms so they would be in view. If we adjusted too much, the mirror image and the silhouette of the arm's movement became unnatural—it was very hard to get this right. We repeated this task again and again, which was very frustrating. However, as a result of all this effort, we were able to express things that other games cannot."

## Doubts

But the team faced a far greater obstacle than its inexperience with the genre. It's well known that (Counter-Strike aside) the FPS genre—like Xbox itself—has simply failed to captivate Japan the way it has America and Europe. There are few examples of such games surviving the trip from Japan (Atlus' *Makken X*, for example) and not one has penetrated the canon of commercially or otherwise—of Western-developed first-person shooters. Kami says: "There were many doubts at the main concept of *Breakdown*, from within Namco and from within the team. We often heard people comment, 'Why don't you make a normal FPS?' The project didn't go smoothly at times, and we were unable to foreshadow our final image of how *Breakdown* would be. For a while we were not sure ourselves how the final game would turn out."

After all, this team of 10 artists, developers, and coders was entering unexplored territory, and it was unproven at making a game anything like *Breakdown*, on which work commenced shortly after Xbox's debut. Kami says: The *Breakdown* team was newly formed for this title three years ago, and their backgrounds are very different. For example, I have worked on *Time Crisis*, *Final Fury*,

etc. Our scenario writer worked on *Ace Combat 4*. The person responsible for the battle and action sequences worked on *Tekken 3*. There are also people who have worked on arcade games such as *Tokyo Wars* and *Alpine Racer*."

So how did this team—inexperienced in first-person ways—prepare for a project like *Breakdown*? Kami explains, "We thought that if we had too much experience from playing

existing FPS games, *Breakdown* could lose originality. However, we did study *Halo*, *Half-Life*, *Unreal*, *Metrod Prime*, etc. Some of them also played *Metal Gear*, *Oriemusha*, and *Grand Theft Auto 3*." Kami hastens to add, "Many of our staff members also play these games for their own personal enjoyment."

*Halo*, *Half-Life*, *Metal Gear*, *Metrod Prime*: It's an impressive list. One game delivers some of the most persuasive first-person action seen on a console to date. Two are instrumental in effectively interweaving storytelling and action in very different ways. The last represents a near-perfect synthesis of Japanese and Western design: a proven Eastern classic retold through Western eyes. *Breakdown*'s structure was beginning to take shape.

### Don't follow that rabbit!

With the team assembled, it was time to craft a game that would best make use of the technology they'd developed. *Breakdown*'s twisty narrative—which features time travel, out-of-body experiences, an unfeeling race of alien antagonists, and one man's metamorphosis from man into superman—gave them plenty of ways and means to mess with players' heads.

Kami says: "We spent a lot of time developing the *Breakdown* story line. The player will discover many mysteries at the beginning of the story. In the middle, those mysteries are developed further, and the many story elements will eventually become clear as the player nears the climax at the end of the game."

If that sounds like a certain movie you've seen shamelessly referenced a million times in the last five years, it may have something to do with the fact that a number of the *Breakdown* staff are, in Kami's words, "big fans."

"However," he continues, "we didn't decide to develop a game based on—or take any scenes directly from—*The Matrix*. We wanted to make a cool game with cool scenes and a cool vision, so some parts of the game unconsciously became similar to the style of *The Matrix*."

When asked whether he's played the game based on the Wachowski brothers' films, Kami-san is predictably polite: "Enter the *Matrix* was just one of the many games we played as research. We thought it re-created the feeling and atmosphere of the movie quite well."

XBN concurs, to a degree, but the game simply failed to do justice to its technocentric source material. Despite the fact that it looked, sounded, and felt like the *Matrix* films, the game failed to capture the feeling of the films—films made by, for, and about geeks, in this case an impossibly handsome geek who happens to stumble upon the empowering nature of truth itself, and kicks ass as a consequence.

Like that geek-cum-asskicker, Derrick Cole—along with the player—awakens to a whole new world where none of the old



## BURGER TIME!

A story, as told by Yasuhiro Noguchi, producer of *Breakdown*

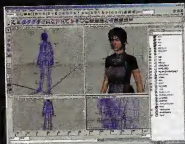
For some comic relief during our development work, I bought 60 hamburgers for the *Breakdown* team. I thought it would be hilarious to remind the team of the scene where Derrick eats the hamburger with the nicksy inside it. I also gathered up all the model guns that were sitting around in the R&D area and placed them strategically near the burgers. I suppose the only things that were missing were the can of soda and the body armor!

Two hamburgers were "laminated with" (one with hot sauce and the other with

chocolate syrup) and placed back with the rest of the burgers. This was the handwork of one of the game designers, Murakita-san.

The hot-sauce burger apparently tasted better than the chocolate-syrup burger. Shimono-san, the art director, was the unlucky recipient of the chocolate-syrup burger, although he was a very good sport about the whole thing!





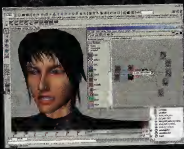
rules apply. Like that hero, the player must use his wits to not only fight foes but also save the world...in a matter of days. But first, like that hero, the player must learn how. Kami says: "One of our main goals was to enable the player to 'become' Derrick. To achieve this, we didn't include cut-scenes or symbolize the movement of arms and legs, and we didn't include too much personality in Derrick's appearance."

### So just who am I, anyway?

Subtler, but just as effective, was the decision to make Cole an amnesiac. Kami explains, "One of the most important parts of any game is the beginning. A player who just begins the game doesn't know anything about the game world. We thought if Derrick was at the same level as the player, they could have the same steps learning how to interact [with] and experience the game."

And the illusion of reality doesn't stop there. "Regarding Derrick's awakening powers," Kami adds, "we didn't want to make it a typical experience-point- or item-related level-up system. The player will experience exactly what Derrick feels while using these mysterious powers without understanding why. Of course, the reason for these events will eventually become clear."

But in order to best maintain that sense of reality, the Breakdown team would have to do a lot more than tell a good story. Displaying an impressive economy of



resources, they do an admirable job. The in-game action is designed around the finished product not as an engine with exponential uses. Physics that can accommodate, say, a glass of water crashing to the floor and the water running down the the drain, aren't accounted for because it's not essential to telling this story. Kami says: "The game system, maps, and sound system were all designed with the overall story in mind."

"I am very satisfied with the overall game graphics and the unique imagery used in the game," he continues. "We put a lot of time and effort into modeling and animating Derrick's arm. If you only see the arm, it is obvious that it can only be from Breakdown. Although the main character is Derrick, I would say the main character of the game is actually his arm. I believe that our character designs—for example the T'lan Warriors and Alex—are very unique compared to other games."

In the end, the team's efforts would prove to be every bit as innovative as they

were impressive. XBN asked Kami-san what aspect he—given the benefit of time and distance—was most pleased with. His answer was revealing: "The one aspect of Breakdown that I am most happy about is its originality. There are so many similar games out currently that it is difficult to tell them apart. In game development, I believe that maintaining originality is more important than maintaining quality, and I am extremely happy with our results."

Those hearty enough to break through to Breakdown's conclusion are rewarded with a finale more emotionally engaging than XBN expects to see in this or any other Xbox action game this year. It's also one of the most open-ended. But when asked whether Xbox owners could expect to "see" themselves in a sequel, Kami is vague: "I think Derrick's story is complete, but the ending does leave the possibility for a sequel open, so if there are enough requests, this may be possible. The idea of a straight sequel is not that appealing. We need to evolve the game further." //

### SECOND CHANCES:

XBN asked producer Kami how he would score Breakdown. Here's what he had to say: 90/100. "I think Breakdown deserves this score because it adds so many new elements to the first-person genre. This is only our first attempt—there are still many more ideas that we would like to try. I would award Breakdown the final 10 points once all these ideas have been implemented. Although once we put everything else in, the game might deserve 120 points!"

**"BREAKDOWN'S GAME SYSTEM, MAPS, AND SOUND SYSTEM WERE ALL DESIGNED WITH THE OVERALL STORY IN MIND."**





UK

## CRITERION CIRCLED

The first games Circle Studio title new outfit founded by Tomb Raider creators Jeremy Heath-Smith and Adrian Smith) creates will come to life on Criterion's RenderWare platform. Circle picked up RenderWare, which also powers Sonic Heroes and Grand Theft Auto, in order to jump right into development of its two upcoming projects for PS2 and Xbox.



EUROPE

## NINJA GAIDEN KEEPS ITS HEAD

While Japanese and American gamers will be able to decapitate their foes with gleeful abandon in *Ninja Gaiden*, the violence in Tecmo's killer action game has been trimmed for its European release. So that it could secure a slightly less controversial classification in Germany and other countries with stringent rating systems, the PAL version is sadly bereft of beheadings.



SOUTH AMERICA

## SAMMY GOES GLOBAL

While more of SNK's console games seem to have—*Survival Chaos*, *Metal Slug 3*, and *King of Fighters 2003* are all confirmed so far—its arcade developers are making an even bigger change. After 15 years on the venerable "24-bit" NeoGeo, SNK's switching to Sammy's Dreamcast-based Atomiswave board for new *KOF*, *Metal Slug*, and *Samurai Shodown* titles. It's all tied up with Sammy's plan to conquer arcades overseas in markets such as Mexico and South America. There are more NeoGeo south of the border than in Japan and the U.S. put together, as well as more SNK fans playing them.



# LONDON CALLING: XBOX IN THE UK.



**Andy Hartup**  
News Editor  
**XBM**

While the world's greatest film stars were sending out their slaves, er, PAs, to retrieve those last-minute extras for the Oscars (smaller dress, fuller bust, bigger car, shinier diamond tiara), the BAFTA game awards were being held in London, hosted by sci-fi comedian Bill Bailey.

In a move that didn't exactly shock the world, *GTA: Vice City* scooped the lion's share of the goings, including Best PS2 Title, Best PC Title, and The Sunday Times Reader's award.

Predictably, the Best Xbox Title award was taken home by *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, with *Project Gotham Racing 2* nabbing the Best Racing Game trophy.

Although there were no real surprises at the ceremony, the event itself represents the confusing

nature of how the game industry is viewed in the U.K. at the moment. These BATFAs show a great desire by the industry to be taken seriously—to be seen as something other than a form of low culture that encourages children to take to the streets, beat up old ladies, and steal cars. It's an uphill struggle, and I myself admit that it will be a good few years before the majority of people I meet stop asking me when I'll be getting "a proper job." It's a strange attitude to take against an industry that is fast becoming the financial equal to Hollywood.

In France, the government takes the game industry seriously, subsidizing developers to make their products the cream of the crop and seeing games as both profitable and beneficial to the country's image. Have the French gotten it so hideously wrong? A look at the U.K. March release list sees *Beyond Good & Evil* (Ubisoft), *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow* (Ubisoft), *Alias* (Acclaim U.K.), and *Carve* (Avgnaut U.K.)...Vive la France!



FAST FACT

**7.00**  
TITLES

Number of football (er, soccer to you) games available for Xbox in the U.K.



JAPAN

## TRUE FANTASY LATER ONLINE

TRUE FANTASY LATER ONLINE  
A spring release for Level 5's MMORPG True Fantasy Live Online was too good to be true after all. Microsoft has pushed the game back to this winter in Japan, with the limited beta test now scheduled to start this summer. Level 5 claims the delay is needed to create the best game possible, but it's looking like American gamers won't go online until sometime in 2005.



JAPAN

## SPIKEOUT ONLINE

Amusement Vision's on-again, off-again Xbox version of the awesome arcade brawler SpikeOut is now permanently switched on. AV boss Toshihiro Nagoshi recently confirmed that the game will appear at E3, and while the Xbox Live multiplayer mode might not be finished by then, players will be fighting online in the final version.



JAPAN

## PICK A GAME...

Hideo Kojima's team at Konami has an original game in the works. The developer recently posted a help-wanted announcement for a low-level programmer to work on a title outside an existing franchise. Kojima's already said he's done with Metal Gear once the upcoming Snake Eater is finished, so all bets are off as to what his next project might be.



## TOKYO TRIBE: XBOX IN JAPAN

Weekly Xbox block parties, a voluminous collection of games, and multiple Xboxes "just in case" are all telltale signs of a hardcore Xbox gamer. But most hardcore setups lack one vital piece—a Japanese Xbox. Sure, the Japanese aren't buying them, but here are five reasons why you should:

1. Special-edition Xboxes are cool, and there's no better way to snag a nonblack Xbox than from Japan. Since the console's launch two years ago, Japanese gamers have been treated to no less than five unique Xbox models, the most recent being the transparent Kasumi Blue model.

2. Japanese Xbox bundles are cheap. The Kasumi Blue bundle, for example, includes the special-edition console and controller, DOA Ultimate, a DVD playback kit, a one-year Xbox Live membership, and the infamous Kasumi body pillow, all for roughly \$215.

3. Most Japanese Xbox releases are English friendly. The dialogue in the Japanese version of Namco's Breakdown is presented completely in English, the Japan-only World Collection series offers English games at a discounted price, and

an increasing number of Xbox games are region free, meaning they work fine with both American and Japanese Xboxes. Recent region-free releases include Rainbow Six 3, Counter-Strike, and Project Gotham Racing 2.

4. Japanese Xbox owners get swag. Those who register their Xboxes get chances to win trips to Hawaii, snap-on Xbox covers designed by famous Japanese artists, True Fantasy Live Online beta-test opportunities, and they even periodically receive presents in the mail from Microsoft as thanks for being an Xbox customer. The hard part will be finding friends in Japan who will let you use their address to receive all the goodies.

5. Microsoft moved less than 100,000 consoles in 2003. Throw in a bonol OK, you're sold. So now, how do you get one for your very own? Online retailers are probably your best bet. Just be prepared to pay a steep shipping fee.



**Ryan Payton**  
Writer  
Tokyo, Japan

PREDICTION

2006

A.D.

The projected year when the following will ship to Japan:



## W'HAPPEN?

It's another XBN flashback, dude!

Too busy playing *Ninja Gaiden* to run out and buy the relaunched issue of *Xbox Nation*? For all you lollygaggers, here're a few scoops...

## WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

The *Toy Story* analogy is soooooo this gen, or so we were told. Gollum is the next benchmark to catch—and if the “leaked” specs for *Xbox Next* are accurate, it might be met next time around. XBN also wondered



whether there's room for anything original on the box. And there is...

## HIT IT 'N' SPLIT IT

XBN's first-ever section dedicated to the online experience—dubbed Live—made its debut with flying colors (orange and black, specifically). Our hands-on feature, “Top Gun,” laid bare just what sort of



sick minds made this issue's cover game, *Eidos' grim Hitman: Contracts*.

## TO THE FUTURE!

In Future, XBN had some in-depth looks at Pandemic's promising *Full Spectrum Warrior*, the intriguing *The Movies*, and *Fight Night*; found 30 minutes to spend with lovable yegg Garrett of *Thief: Deadly Shadows*; and crash tested cars. Just for you.

## REVIEWS IN REVIEW

Surprising no one, *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow* perfected everything set by its predecessor. Even better? It includes quite the compelling online mode. Also worth your time and money: *Colin McRae Rally 04*, *MVP Baseball 2004*, and Namco's excellent *Breakdown*.

## CALENDAR

25

Ah, May. That whole dancing around the maypole with a ribbon and a pocketful of posies never quite clicked with us...

26

...but we do get giddy this month nonetheless. For gamers, May can mean only one thing: E3. We brave the raucous parties...

27

...with beautiful booth babes and live music each night, and then push through the throng on the show floor the next day...

02



03

...and now—94 entries on *Billboard*'s list 100 and still laying it down strong. James Brown, the hardest-working man in show business, turns 71...

04

A full plate starts off the month, including *Operation Flashpoint*, *Rent a Hero No. 2*, *Sheek 2*, *Digimon Rumble Arena 2*, *The Mummy*, and *Pilot Down*.

NEW GAME

05

For the love of PB&J, don't forget Mom's special day. Skip the e-greeting card, take a break from the games, and remind her of how important she is.

10

Weeks of training comes down to this: E3 week begins.

11

It's time for hour after hour of mind-numbing press conferences. Fear not, we'll filter out all the bad stuff and post only the best info at IUP.com.

E3

15



17

OK, maybe the bite is worse—something to keep in mind during National Dog Bite Prevention Week.

18

Master thief Garrett returns in *Thief: Deadly Shadows*. Sneak around a gritty medieval world to earn a thief's reputation? Count us in! >>

NEW GAME

23



24

Get out—at least of school if you're in Canada today. It's Victoria Day. So what if she was queen of the U.K. and died over 100 years ago, who questions a day off? <<

25

*Buff the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Sixth Season* is out today on DVD. Hey, it's got the musical episode! >>

30



31

After the long weekend, Memorial Day is more than welcome. School's out, summertime is here, game on! Out today: *Ultimate Fishing Challenge*.

NEW GAME

01

## THE MONTH AHEAD ON XBOX MAY 2004

28

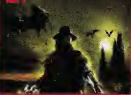
...to get our readers the very best in Xbox news. Sure, it's tough working at XBN, but somebody's got to do it.

29

Oh, and lest we forget, time to check those feet—it's Fungal Infection Awareness Month.

30

01



05

NEW GAME

Cinco de Mayo brings us two highly anticipated games, *RalliSport Challenge 2* and—hip! hip!—SNK's *Metal Slug 3*.

06

NEW GAME

Hed the Hindenburg not burst into flames on this day in 1937, we'd all live in a romantic world of airships—à la *Crimson Skies*. uh, or maybe not.

07

We dig monster bashing as much as anyone, but *Van Helsing*? Sing? What is this, *American Idol*? Both the movie and videogame come out today. \*

08



12

E3

NEW GAME

Day One: Brace yourself for the deluge of hands-on impressions as the show floor officially opens. Available today: *Headhunter: Redemption*.

13

E3

Day Two: Our battle-tested crew jumps back into the front lines. Don't let their efforts be in vain, get the latest updates at [1UP.com](http://1UP.com).

14

E3

Day Three: Must...keep...going...and make at least one trip down to the Kentia Hall displays, see *Troy*, and then pass out in our hotel rooms.

15

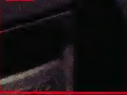


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NEW GAME

Witness Eddie Murphy make an ass of himself, as an animated donkey that is, watch him at it again in *Shrek 2*. Also out today, *Film World Tour Tennis*.

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When will then be now? Soon...*The Day After Tomorrow* hits theaters today. <<

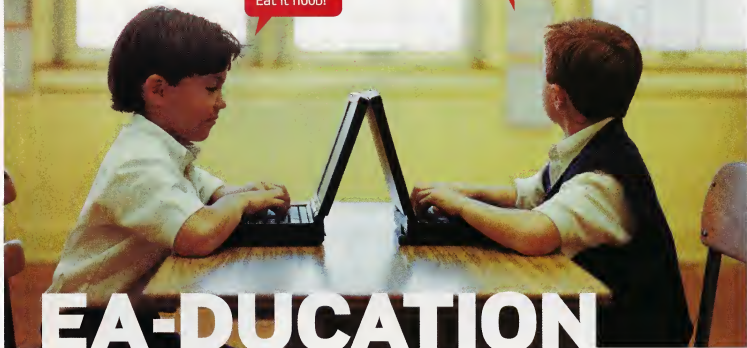
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I can play  
without  
looking.

Eat it n00b!



# EA-EDUCATION

## Electronic Arts funds higher education

Game behemoth Electronic Arts recently donated \$8 million to the University of Southern California (USC), an EA public relations representative says. The money will be used to fund two portions of the school's cinema and television division of interactive media, essentially creating a series of programs and courses centered around the creation of videogames.

Specifically, the donated funds have created the Electronic Arts Interactive Program and the Electronic Arts Endowed Faculty Chair. The new interactive Program will offer both an undergraduate minor and a master's degree in interactive entertainment. The Faculty Chair, an advisory position, will be held by Don Mattrick, president of Electronic Arts Worldwide Studios.

No specific timeframe has been given for the implementation of this program, but an EA press release heralds it as "the world's first accredited undergraduate and graduate program that features curriculum designed around the creative, technical, and business [aspects] of interactive entertainment."

Coursework will focus directly on game design, according to Tammy Schacter, EA's senior manager for corporate communications. Students in the interactive entertainment studies program can study, among other things, animation, scriptwriting, programming, game artwork,

and project management. EA representatives will be working closely with USC officials to create this new curriculum, and the company has also promised to provide the tools necessary for these studies. To this end, EA executives will be tapped to teach certain courses, Schacter says.

The newly created program will not be a direct pipeline into EA, emphasizes Schacter. Although select students will have the opportunity to intern at EA, there is no expectation that graduates will have jobs waiting for them. The reverse is true as well. "We hope that graduating students will be energized by their experience and seek a career in interactive entertainment, but they would not be obligated to work at EA," Schacter says.

As part of its enormous investment, EA gains a seat on the USC Board of Chancellors, to be filled by Mattrick. //



## CLASS ACTION

USC won't be the only place would-be game makers can go to learn the craft. Keep your options open; check out these schools for higher videogame education:

### DigiPen Institute of Technology

Redmond, WA  
[www.digipen.edu](http://www.digipen.edu)

This haven for students seeking employment in the game industry can receive bachelor's and associate degrees in real-time interactive computer science, computer animation, and production animation.

### Full Sail

Winter Park, FL  
[www.fullsail.com](http://www.fullsail.com)

Full Sail's website says that the school offers degrees in computer animation, digital media, entertainment business, film, game design and development, recording arts, and show production and touring.

### Carnegie Mellon University

Pittsburgh, PA  
[www.cmu.edu](http://www.cmu.edu)

Known primarily for its engineering studies, Carnegie Mellon also lets students study programming, game design, and 3D animation.

### The Guildhall at Southern Methodist University

Dallas, TX  
[www.guildhall.smu.edu](http://www.guildhall.smu.edu)

Deep in the heart of Texas, students can get degrees in art creation, level design, and software development. Sadly, classes in the creation of kart-driving, coin-collecting funny animal mascots have been discontinued.

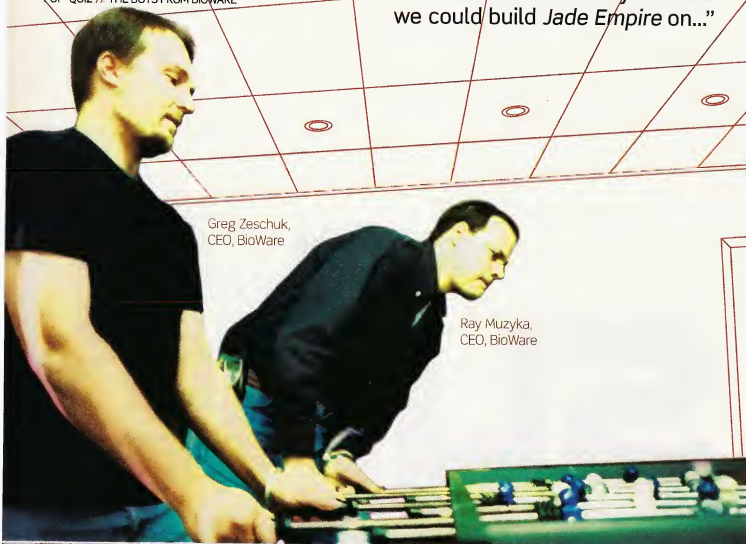


**INTRODUCING**

**sync<sup>TM</sup>**

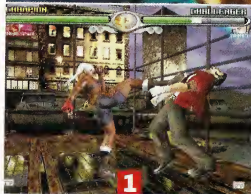
**<http://checkout.syncmagazine.com>**

"The Xbox is the only console we could build *Jade Empire* on..."



Greg Zeschuk,  
CEO, BioWare

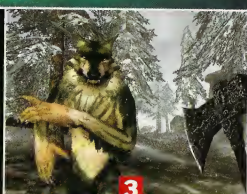
Ray Muzyka,  
CEO, BioWare



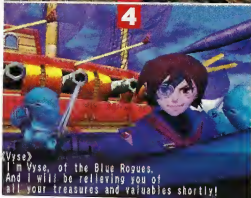
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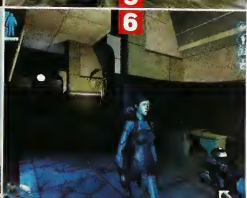
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3  
6



"Vyse"  
I'm Vyse, of the Blue Rogues.  
And I will be relieving you of  
all your treasures and valuables shortly!



## POP QUIZ

We name their influences. They tell us if we're right...

XBN talks shop with the boys from BioWare: Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk

## 1 Virtua Fighter 4 SEGA PS2

**Ray Muzyka:** Virtua Fighter 4?

**XBN:** Correct. You're putting a real-time fighting engine in *Jade Empire*, which hasn't been done before in an RPG, has it?

**RM:** We're always looking to push boundaries in BioWare's RPGs—game size and scope, mixing game genres together, pushing the envelope in story line and character development—and we thought it would be a natural fit for the game we were trying to make with *Jade Empire*. Jade will have a lot of tactics and depth, and a lot of roleplaying to develop your character, but it will have a real-time combat system.

**XBN:** Which games did you draw upon as influence for your engine?

**Greg Zeschuk:** RPGs, action-adventure games, action games in general, and to a lesser degree, fighters and brawlers. There are elements that Jade has from all the different types, but it's not really the same as any of them in many ways. We're trying to merge [those] elements with the elements of a traditional console RPG—our goal is to appeal to both action-adventure fans and traditional RPG fans.

## 2 Ultima VII Origin Systems PC

**RM:** Yeah, we knew this was *Ultima*—is it *Ultima VII* or *Ultima VI*? It doesn't look like *VII*...

**XBN:** It's *Ultima VII*. How did the *Ultima* series influence you as RPG developers?

**RM:** Yeah, they were great games, and it's interesting to see, more than anything, the evolution of how Origin sort of gradually changed the different elements. From *Ultima* (Alkaleth) to *Ultima II*, *III*, and beyond—to see how new elements kept being added in every couple of years through the '80s and the '90s, and then see the evolution into *Ultima Underworld*, which was one of Greg's and my top five favorite games of all time.

## 3 Morrowind Bethesda Softworks PC/Xbox

**RM:** This looks like *Morrowind*.

**XBN:** It's *Morrowind*, which was an ambitious RPG and very PC-centric in its design. How do PC RPGs tend to translate to consoles?

**GZ:** The interface is one of the big differences between PC and consoles. You have to be really cognizant of PC users using the keyboard, and the console users using different input devices, creating a different feel between a console and a PC RPG.

## 4 Skies of Arcadia SEGA Dreamcast/PS2

**GZ:** I knew in about two seconds that this was *Skies of Arcadia*. I've got this poster. This was a really exciting and unique game, one of my favorite console RPGs.

**XBN:** Do you guys think that after the success of *KOTOR*, traditional RPGs are on their way out from the Western market?

**RM:** I don't really think so. The great thing with the Western market is that it's pretty big. Part of being big is a really wide range of perspectives and an openness to trying new kinds of entertainment and games.

**GZ:** There will always be ways to take elements from the great games of the past. Great console RPGs, *Chrono Cross*, the *Final Fantasy* series, and so on. As developers and fans of the great games of the past, we can take ideas from those kinds of games and merge them with other ideas and ultimately strive to create something even better.

## 5 Armed and Dangerous LucasArts PC/Xbox

**GZ:** *Armed and Dangerous* is the game. I think it's actually very, very tight. I found the cut-scenes really awesome.

**XBN:** *Armed and Dangerous* has a healthy selection of characters, not unlike your sequel to Shiny's MDK...

**GZ:** It was a lot of fun. I remember very distinctly the point to have the multiple characters and the different actions. That was actually the cornerstone of the game.

**RM:** And—in some ways—our games of the future. We're trying to enable people to have different play styles. To allow them to role-play different types of characters whether they be more action oriented, stealth oriented, thoughtful, or charismatic.

**XBN:** Action games versus RPG: Which are more difficult to make?

**RM:** Both? There are different kinds of challenges. From our experience making both types, these are very different kinds of games to make, and they both pose significant challenges if you're going to do them well. In an RPG, some of the challenge is the sheer number of assets, the ways they interact, the nonlinearity, and testing all those different permutations of quests.

**GZ:** On the pure action-game side, in a game like MDK2, it's not so much the volume of the assets, but the actions and the emergent gameplay resulting from them. When a character uses a jetpack, trying to build an environment where that doesn't cause a big problem is really tough.

## XBN: Why did you take on Jade Empire instead of making KOTOR2?

**RM:** We can't talk about *KOTOR2* yet, out of courtesy to LucasArts, but we've been extremely excited about making [*Jade Empire*] for a long, long time. We were talking about it back in '97 or '98. There was an early prototype we did in '98 that will stay forever locked in the BioWare vaults... [laughs]

**XBN:** What was in the prototype?

**GZ:** We visualized how a martial arts RPG could actually work. For us, a lot of it was that the technology wasn't ready for what we wanted to do. With the advent of Xbox and our ability to create a unique engine, after some experience on the system, we can really push the envelope technically, but also the mo-cap animation and all that kind of stuff. I think the time is right for BioWare to develop this game—everything is in alignment. The Xbox is the only console where we could build this sort of game on.

## 6 Deus Ex: Invisible War Eidos Interactive PC/Xbox

**GZ:** That's *Deus Ex 2*.

**XBN:** What do you think of it?

**RM:** The original game [*Deus Ex*] was one of our favorites. The sequel was kind of cool, too, in that the quests would branch when you set out to do a certain goal. The mutually exclusive nature of the game quests was interesting, too; you could follow only one of the paths to conclusion.

**XBN:** Strangely, the game maintained the illusion that the player had freedom...

**GZ:** That's exactly the disappointment of it, as we saw it. The technical requirements being so high, it probably had to be smaller as a result. So it felt a lot more constrained, a lot more linear, more on a direct path.

**XBN:** Will *Jade* feature a similar sort of branching, nonlinear gameplay?

**RM:** Yeah, as Greg said, this is one of our core goals for BioWare games, and it will be a big feature of *Jade* as well—we're trying hard to make *Jade* the best game we've ever made.

**GZ:** Our producer on *Jade Empire*, Jim Bishop, described the story of *Jade Empire* as "low do you deal with power?" That is, what decisions would you make? That was a really powerful statement in itself—of what it would feel like to be a really powerful martial arts master by the end of the game.

**RM:** We like the games where you get put in the position of having to make tough decisions, and we'll keep trying this approach at BioWare—our goal is to make each game we create better than the last. //

## ABOUT: POP QUIZ

Each month, XBN pops the quiz on an Xbox game designer. We show our guests a series of screenshots and let them identify the game. We then ask them to comment on that game's relevance—if there is any—to their own work. By discussing various external influences, we hope to gain insight into their own creative processes.

## ABOUT: BIOWARE

Based in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, BioWare was founded in 1995 by Dr. Ray Muzyka and Dr. Greg Zeschuk, who serve as joint CEOs and co-executive producers, and has more than 160 people on staff. BioWare has two projects currently in development: *Jade Empire* for Xbox and a yet-to-be-announced RPG for PC. BioWare has also licensed its game-engine technology to such critically acclaimed RPGs as the *Icewind Dale* series and *Planescape: Torment*.

## PREVIOUS WORK:

Baldur's Gate  
Baldur's Gate II  
MDK  
MDK 2: Armageddon  
Neverwinter Nights  
Shadows of  
Underride  
Shattered Steel  
Star Wars: KOTOR

# CONNECTED

We came, we saw, we surfed



## 1 Warthog Launch

[nikon.bungie.org/misc/warthog\\_launch/warthog\\_launch.swf](http://nikon.bungie.org/misc/warthog_launch/warthog_launch.swf)

Kill time while you wait for *Halo 2* by playing this simple, addictive little flash game. Just position that warthog, set some explosives, and BOOM! Now that we think about it, just about any decent flash game is simple and addictive. Like smoking—but not as bad for your health.

## 3 Top Scores

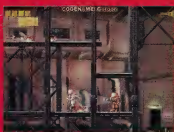
[www.cbcradio3.com/issues/2004\\_03\\_05/index.cfm?page20](http://www.cbcradio3.com/issues/2004_03_05/index.cfm?page20)

This simple, yet comprehensive page details the history of videogame music, from Pong's signature blip all the way up to the glorious '80s-style excess of the *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* soundtrack.



## UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Start with *Unreal Championship*, a flawed game fit for Xbox Live players...



## 2 Codename: Gordon

[www.half-life2.com](http://www.half-life2.com)

Conversely, if you're more of a Half-Life sort of guy (or gal), check out *Codename: Gordon*, the home base for a free, fan-based 2D side-scroller starring everyone's favorite hapless crowbar-wielding hero. Thank Warbeast (graphics) and X-Tender (coding) for this not-quite-ready 2D romp.

## 4 The Custom Alliance

[www.thecustomalliance.com](http://www.thecustomalliance.com)

Has KOTOR made you want to learn even more about these so-called Star Wars? The Custom Alliance features more one-off Star Wars dolies—from the films to fan fiction—than you can shake a lightsaber at, plus recipes for making your very own Darth Bandan figure.



## SW JK II: JEDI OUTCAST

...add *Jedi Knight II* (also flawed), which features ranged and melee mayhem...

# WEIRD AND WONDERFUL!

Conventional wisdom dictates that to succeed in Japan, a platform needs many games with big-eyed cartoon chicks. Which means conventional wisdom needs a tune-up, because Microsoft's Japanese division has sold about one-fourth of a console so far, yet its cup of big-eyed cartoon chicks runneth over. Visual novels, simulation RPGs, relationship simulations, it's got 'em all. Here are some local favorites:



## Aoi Namida

*Aoi Namida* means "blue tears," which usually means you should see your ophthalmologist. However, as the screenshots show, in this case, it means "stacked exhibitionist biker librarians," which for our money is more than enough to make up for the complete lack of gameplay in the digital-comic genre.



## Galaxy Angel

*Galaxy Angel* is a straight knockoff of Sega's *Sakura Taisen*, but even more pastel, which probably involved rewriting several fundamental laws of arithmetic physics. Otherwise, the game's the same: Make nice with the crew of perky cartoon cube pies so that they'll perform up to par in the strategy battle sequences.



## N.U.D.E.@

We'd have a better handle on this game if any of us had bought it, but none of us were willing to risk getting caught at customs with a copy in our luggage. If talking to a 3D Hajime Sorayama lilo is your idea of a good time on a Saturday night, QJ-Hiro's *Natural Ultimate Digital Experiment* should be right up your alley.



## TRIANGLE AGAIN

This early Xbox "visual novel" had the peculiar fortune to draw interest from the Western press, since it was one of the first Japan-only Xbox titles. Once everyone realized it was an adventure in idol singer management, though, the media came to its collective senses.

# XPONENTS: WE DO THE MATH SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!



## UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Start with *Unreal Championship*, a flawed game fit for Xbox Live players...

X



## SW JK II: JEDI OUTCAST

...add *Jedi Knight II* (also flawed), which features ranged and melee mayhem...

=



## UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2

...mix, then look forward to this fine return to the series' trademark form.



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# LIVE

WHERE XBOX LIVE CALLS HOME MAY 2004

# UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2

What happens when you bring your sword to a gun party...

 **Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict** defies expectations. Though a cursory glance might recall everything that has defined the series for the past six years—fast action, spandex-clad characters, heavy weaponry—there is, in fact, something decidedly evolutionary lurking beneath the

surface. In a word: swords.

Though it may sound like a minor detail, swords and other close-combat weapons in fact add an entirely new, compelling facet to the violent proceedings. Essentially, those who prefer their action games to be of the third-person-slashing variety have the option of confronting their first-person-shooting brethren with their character's particular melee weapon of choice. And it doesn't feel tacked on, either; believe it or not, the third-person control seems every bit as tight as the first-person antics, utilizing an approach that brings to mind a significantly evolved version of

LucasArts' *Jedi Knight*.

But how to balance a pair of katanas against, say, a rocket launcher? Players can leap off of walls and pull off an assortment of midair flips and combos (styled specifically to their character), switching between guns and swords all the while. A cool deflection move allows players to volley blasts back in the direction of he whose gun fired them; nevertheless, balance will, of course, be crucial. The camera will essentially take care of itself; *Liandri* Programmer Stephen Superville notes, "We don't want the player to be worrying about the camera when he should be worried about his character."

Even at this early stage, it's clear that *Liandri* looks to be the console-oriented *Unreal* game



## WHAT WE SAID:

Unreal Championship

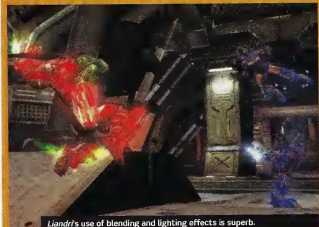
// XBN 05

➤ "Unreal is a solid and often-times visually arresting title but, sadly, not the killer app that Xbox Live desperately needs. Good and violent fun we were just hoping for a bit more polish."

**XBN RATING: 7.0**



Adamantium claws versus a sniper rifle? It's like a \$3.99 buffet of violence!



Llandri's use of blending and lighting effects is superb.



that fans had hoped for when Tournament first launched with Xbox Live. It should be noted that the game looks considerably nicer than its predecessor. This is due partially to the fact that it's being developed in-house at Epic (whereas the original *Unreal Championship* was farmed out to Ontario-based Digital Extremes), as well as the fact that it's using the latest revision of the *Unreal* engine, designed exclusively to take advantage of the Xbox hardware.

It's a graphical showpiece, making use of nearly every built-in effect Xbox has to

offer, as well as streamlined, *Halo*-inspired controls. (In terms of speed, however, *Llandri* will be substantially faster. "*Halo* was a tank," Superville says. "We're a sports car.") The game will also include what the team refers to as an "ample" single-player campaign, noting that "80 percent of the people who are gonna play this game are guys sitting home alone." If the team can strike the right balance between the ranged and hand-to-hand combat styles, this could easily be one of Microsoft's most accomplished first-party titles to date. //

## CROSS-DRESSING

➤ The *Llandri Conflict* attempts to mesh elements of different genres, including first-person shooters, third-person swordplay games, and... fighting games? By giving each character his or her own arsenal of ranged and close-range weapons as well as player-specific combos, the game attempts to give players as much flexibility as possible. "If there's one thing we've learned," Epic's Lead Designer Cliff Bleszinski says, "it's that people want freedom of choice when they play games."



CAN'T **LIVE** WITHOUT IT

Xbox Nation picks the top 10 must-play Xbox Live experiences

## CRIMSON SKIES



**PUB:** Microsoft Games  
**DEV:** Microsoft Games  
**WITHOUT LIVE:** Two-player  
 spitscreen

**WITH LIVE:** Up to 16 players / simultaneous spitscreen two-player and online / ranking list / dogfight, team dogfight, flag hunt, leap away, team accumulate, wild chicken

➤ Although there's a B52's worth of mileage to be found in the traditional dogfight and capture-the-flag game modes, wild chicken is where *Crimson Skies* really shines. Looking like something out of the movie *Chicken Run*, the chicken is a squawking, flapping, feather-spraying ball that each team tries to snatch from the air and bring back to its base. This guy is so funny that even if you lose the game, it's a riot just to play.

**DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT:**

New planes: Curtiss-Wright J2 Fury—A small dogfighter that's most popular among aces due to its extremely high-damage machine guns. A slow rate of fire makes accurate aiming a must. New maps: The Caverns for team-based game modes, this map has two large caves connected by large tunnels, so bring nimble planes like the Fury if you want to stay alive.

## COUNTER-STRIKE



**PUB:** Microsoft Games  
**DEV:** Microsoft Games  
**WITHOUT LIVE:** 11-A1, multiplayer  
 emulation (read: Bots)

**WITH LIVE:** 16-player hostage rescue and demolition / rankings

➤ Join either the terrorists or the antiterrorist forces in one of the best modern urban-combat games ever made. Just as the terrorists hold hostages and plant timed explosives to take out their objectives, so must the antiterrorists rescue the hostages and stop or defuse the bombs. If that sounds simple, it's because it is. It's simple to understand and play, so there's a reason why this is the No. 2 most-played game on Xbox Live!

**DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT:**

New maps: Office—One of the best hostage maps from the PC version, this level will teach you all about watching your back—or better yet, having your teammates do it for you. Inferno—it's set in a fairly large European town, and both teams will find lots of opportunity for almost every type of traditional CS action, from knife-stabbing in the dark to sniping from windows.

## PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2



**PUB:** Microsoft Games  
**DEV:** Microsoft Games  
**WITHOUT LIVE:** Four-player  
 spitscreen

**WITH LIVE:** Simultaneous spitscreen two-player and online / eight-player racing / ghost racing / rankings

➤ The premier Xbox racing game only gets better once you bring it online—allowing you to race against up to eight other players alone or with a friend—but the gold medal feature is ghost racing mode. Since Live automatically records your entire performance at the end of every race, ghost mode can play back the race with a transparent "ghost" car that anyone with Live can race against. Hone your skills against the ghost of the No. 1 PGR2 player in the world, then challenge a friend to beat your best "ghost" time or filter the player list to just your friends and see if you can beat them. It's the driving force that makes PGR2 an absolute must-have for racing fans.

**DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT:**

It just came out—be patient!

## ESPN NFL FOOTBALL 2004



**PUB:** Microsoft Games  
**DEV:** Microsoft Games  
**WITHOUT LIVE:** Four players

**WITH LIVE:** Eight players / rankings

➤ After you've pounded the hell out of your friends at home, isn't it about time you and your Wonder Twins power activate your Live account and bring your combined skills to bear on folks online? Pitting your home team against someone else's home team when you're both in your home cities gets real personal real fast, which is exactly what makes Live matches so rewarding. Sharing your sweet victories and bitching out your fumbling friends while tossing the pigskin online is as close to real football as you're going to get, short of getting a real one and—*gasp*—going out to the field for some 4-on-4.

**DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT:**

Four ESPN NFL roster updates, the latest of which is accurate as of 1/2/04.



## UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP



**PUB:** Atari  
**DEV:** Digital Extremes  
**WITHOUT LIVE:** Four-player  
 spitscreen / match, team  
 deathmatch, Survival, CTF, bombing

run, double domination  
 last man standing  
**WITH LIVE:** Up to 16 players /  
 simultaneous spitscreen four-player  
 and online / ranking list

➤ *Unreal Championship* had online play locked down from the get-go, and it has more than maintained its role since. You'll find online of players online at all times, and the wide selection of maps has only increased with the downloadable additions. More than 25 maps, avatars with personalized stats, and weapons like the Link gun (combined with the player's strength for team-powered destruction) make it easy to understand why it's still one of the most popular titles. It's also the only online game that will allow up to three friends to join or quit midgame, switching in and out of spitscreen mode without missing a beat.

**DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT:**

**New maps:** *Inferno*—A castle in hell with multilevel winding passages that emphasize close-quarters battle.  
*AquaMortis*—An old-school medium-sized arena ideal for deathmatches of any style.  
*Laviathan*—Deceptively named, it's a tiny little deathmatch map, perfect for a cozy beatdown with a friend.  
*OtanosRun*—This CTF map is a lush, luminous valley with weapons and power-ups nestled throughout.

## RAINBOW SIX 3



**PUB:** Ubisoft  
**DEV:** Ubisoft Montreal  
**WITHOUT LIVE:** Single-player  
 missions only. No multiplayer

**WITH LIVE:** Missions, terrorist hunt,  
 survival, team survival, and  
 sharpshooter / rankings

➤ If you have *Rainbow Six 3* and haven't gone online, you're cheating yourself. Jumping online for co-op missions against the A.I. lets you replace your automation squad with your (arguably) brainier pals. If you think single play is actually child's play, join the big boys in the survival modes, in which quick tactical thinking becomes more important than firearm accuracy. Few online games make as much use of the communicator as *RS3*, because talking with your teammates isn't just fun, but also a necessary part of focusing your strength on the enemy.

**DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT:**

**New maps:** *Carnival Sharpshooter*—Behind the scenes at Mardi Gras, fight amongst the floats or between the buildings surrounding them as fireworks explode overhead.  
*Garage Sharpshooter*—Join the firefight at the local auto sales shop, ducking behind cars and desks, but leave your sniper rifle at home because this is close-quarters all the way.

## MECHASSAULT



**PUB:** Microsoft Games  
**DEV:** Day 1 Studios  
**WITHOUT LIVE:** Two-player  
 spitscreen / destruction, team  
 destruction, last man standing, team

LMS, not it  
**WITH LIVE:** Eight players /  
 simultaneous spitscreen two-player  
 and online / capture the flag, check it,  
 take it, skirmish/team skirmish, more

➤ *MechAssault* takes quite full advantage of Live by offering the rare combination of simultaneous spitscreen and online play function, so you and your friend can take it online with only one Xbox or a Live account. It shipped with tons of mechs and maps, but as the Live title with the most downloadable content, there's almost twice as much available after updating online.

**DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT:**

**New mechs:** *Corvus*—A fast, light BattleMech with jump jets, perfect for CTF flag running.  
*Raven*—Like the *Corvus*, the *Raven* comes with a stealth mode that lasts twice as long but has no jump jets.  
*Loki*—Dual auto-cannons and pulse lasers loaded on a medium mech with stealth mode.  
*Hallbringer*—Raise the heat with this flamer-equipped, jump-jetting medium mech.

**New maps:** *Hell's Kitchen*—This dark, volcanic map is littered with industrial buildings and flowing lava, making it especially hard to stay cool.

*Midtown*—A very popular CTF map with bases located on opposite sides of a small city.  
*Desert Storm*—Riddled with valleys, this CTF map has multiple destroyable bridges.

*Stone Cold*—In this fairly wide-open map, snow is the only thing between you and the enemy.  
*Demolition Town*—Deep urban map for close combat and collapsing-building excitement.

*Rock Solid*—Bring your jump jets for this gray, tiered map, since power-ups are placed on high perches.  
*Jotenheim*—Another popular CTF arctic map, loaded with hills and valleys perfect for flag running.

*Secret Outpost*—A winding arctic map designed for the check-it and take-it modes, complete with security gates and guard turrets.

*Magma Fields*—Five areas to capture, with guard turrets for each, this map is perfect for check-it matches.

*City Under Siege*—With multiple walled bases located in the basin of a huge crater, this is another great map for the check-it mode.

**New game modes:** *Giant Killers*—One big mech against a team of elementals. First one to take down the big guy gets to be him.  
*Scout match/team scout match*—Essentially, this is destruction mode with light mechs only.

*Skirmish/team skirmish*—Destruction mode with light and medium mechs only.

*Check it*—Two teams compete for control over checkpoints spread throughout the map.

*Take it*—A CTF variant in which you must steal the other team's data core from its base.

\*\$4.99 premium charge required, but it's worth it—particularly with the *MechAssault* price tag being less than 20 dollars.

## MIDTOWN MADNESS 3



**PUB:** Microsoft Games  
**DEV:** Digital Illusions  
**WITHOUT LIVE:** Two-player  
 split-screen cruise, blitz, and  
 checkpoint racing

**WITH LIVE:** Eight-player checkpoint,  
 cruise, capture the gold, tag, hunter,  
 stayaway

Single player is fun, but putting your skills up against your fellow man will keep you up nights in *Midtown Madness 3*. Getting Live is the on-ramp to modes such as capture the gold (read: flag), tag, and the aptly named stayaway, all of which test your ability to dodge human cerebrums instead of lampposts and café tables. The best mode is hunter, a helper-tag variant. If the hunter player touches you in this mode, you become a hunter as well, making being the last guy untangled white-knuckle fun at its best. As if that weren't enough, the sheer number of free car and track downloads will keep you plenty busy.

**DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT:**

**New Cars:** Stocker—The most popular new car for online play, the stocker is a straight-up stock car. With a top speed of 280 mph, this sucker claws the road and takes a whoopin', to boot! R4000—A speedy and awesome handler.  
**Trasher**—Early '80s hot rod.  
**Shopper**—Shopping cart gone American Chopper.  
**Ambassador**—Prohibition-era classic.  
**Furious**—Ferrari Carrera...renamed!  
**Carica**—Futuristic sports car with stats to match.  
**LastKraftWagen**—It's a dumpster, man. A dumpster!  
**Formula Midtown**—Indy 500 madness.  
**Concept**—Seems like the precursor to the Carica.  
**Rusty**—'50s heap back from the junkyard.  
**Campione**—Lamborghini by any other name...  
**Python**—Well-balanced sports car.  
**Burken**—'90s sports car.  
**New tracks:** Washington and Paris gain 20 new tracks each

## RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN



**PUB:** Activision  
**DEV:** Nerve Software  
**WITHOUT LIVE:** Two-player co-op  
 split-screen mode

**WITH LIVE:** 15-player objective,  
 stopwatch, checkpoint, elimination /  
 rankings

Teamwork is the real name of this game, and you can't get it without Live. Unlike other shooters, *RTCW* has you choose from different classes (soldier, engineer, medic, lieutenant), which each play a specific role in helping its team win. For instance, objective mode missions have specific goals that must be met, like dynamiting a wall, which will require the engineer's unique skill to achieve. It's one of the most popular Live titles to date, with plenty of servers available, and as their victory rests partially on your shoulders, you'll find your teammates eager to verbally assist you in-game.

**DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT:**

**New maps:** Chateau—One large manor holds a set of battle plans and a radio room. Dynamite your way in and navigate the labyrinthine passages in order to broadcast those plans or defend the chateau against intruders.  
**Safe**—Set in a bombed-out Axis base, the Allied team will need to blow a generator that will power down an electric field guarding the safe, which needs to be dynamited so that the plans inside can be spirited away. Simple!  
**Barn**—This cozy little barn is a perfect place for your team to stack bodies. It's dark and loaded with nooks and crannies for up-close-and-personal action.

## MAGIC: THE GATHERING—BATTLEGROUND



**PUB:** Atari  
**DEV:** Secret Level  
**WITHOUT LIVE:** Some-screen two-  
 player duels, quest mode

**WITH LIVE:** Online duels with one- or  
 two-color decks / ranking list

When you're done with the single-player quest mode, you'll have unlocked all 70 spells available in the game—and if you have Live, then that's when the fun begins. The single-player modes are simply training missions for showing you how to use the spells, but the online duels allow you to test your creativity by making your own spell combinations and challenging the far more flexible human players. Whether or not you want to be an aggressive, creature-summoning madman or a more passive mage—countering or using your opponent's spells against them—is entirely up to you. Hell, you can even do both!

**DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT:**

None so far, but new arenas and spells are planned.

# THE SPLITTER

## Tips from Live guru Matt Holmes

The last time I played *ESPN NFL Football* on Live, I felt like an extra commentator, because anything my opponents said online would come only through my Communicator and I'd have to parrot it to the room. Well, folks, for \$5.99 at Radio Shack, you can pick up a stereo-to-stereo audio adapter (part 274-948) that will happily allow you to plug in a 3/32"-plug cell-phone headset and

your Xbox Communicator headset. You may need to cut some of the plastic off at the base of the adapter plug to make it fit more snugly, but it works like a charm. The downside? Both people will appear to be speaking as "Player One" since they are both using essentially the same controller. I'm sure we'll get over it.



# XBOX LIVE 3.0

Live's new features explained

It seems like only yesterday that the new Xbox Live dashboard began greeting us when we powered up our Xboxes, a fancy green sign of great things to come. This first upgrade gave us the much-needed friend list and voice-chat interface, showed our friends' status online, and allowed non-Live games to recognize invites from Live-enabled games. With the second upgrade coming this spring, the boys developing Xbox Live will be beefing up the system's back end, J. Lo style.

If the Hensons were to be, say, Scott Henson, director of platform strategy for Xbox, then you might say we went straight to the horse's mouth for the scoop on Live 3.0...



## TEAMS

After this upgrade, you'll be able to gather your friends' Gamertags together and form a clan. Sending messages and invites to your team, tracking your team's rankings, and joining tournaments together will soon be second nature. Combine this with the new online-storage function so that games will support team logos or custom (read: made by you) team arenas that everyone can access, and the word "community" starts making sense.

Scott Henson: "The real magic comes from the bonds that are formed when a group of people come together under a common umbrella, a common creed, and go out and compete against other folks and have stats for that win-loss record. You get, 'Here's what we're about—we're rough and tumble, we're a finesse team, we have our own identity.' So that's what's going to happen now—groups are going to get a much stronger identity and reputation, and we've built the back end and infrastructure to let that happen."



## COMPETITIONS

Official tournaments will be possible, with complete tracking and rankings for individual contestants or teams. If you want to go for a more personal setup, you will be able to configure your own tournament and invite your friends or challenge rival teams. The setup and results of these competitions can be handled through websites such as XSN and MyLive (which are already active for viewing regular scoreboards and players) or the developers' websites.



## VOICE AND TEXT MESSAGING

How many times have you seen a friend request and wondered who the hell this guy is? Next time someone contacts you on Live, it might have a marker indicating an attached message explaining why you should deign to acknowledge their existence, or just how much you need their skills in your newly formed clan. Henson says: "Soon, when you do get a friend or game invite, they'll be able to put a 10- to 15-second message on it so you will know who it is or when to meet up." Check online status and scoreboards now at <https://www.xbox.com/en-US/Live/MyLive>.



## INSTANT MESSENGER ALERTS

For those of us who are PC mouse potatoes, soon we'll be able to find out who's playing on Live or receive Live game invites via a new Xbox Live MSN Messenger tab. It should also be possible to send text messages back and forth, but we'll have to wait and see on that one.

Henson's example: "Now, if I'm playing *Rainbow Six 3* and I send you a game invite but you're not on Live, you'll get that 'invite on your Windows box.'"



## ONLINE STORAGE

Ever been at a friend's house and wanted to access the *ESPN NFL Football* playlist or roster you have at home? No problem. Now, a small online-storage area will allow for the trading of player-created content, including user-made maps, logos, or stats. Perhaps you'll finally be able to trade *Magic: The Gathering—Battlegrounds* decks with your friends online. "With online storage, gamers become creators. They get to participate in creating their own game experience..."

## TOP 10 LIVE GAMES

Most-played Live games through Feb.

1. **TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX 3**
2. **PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2**
3. **COUNTER-STRIKE**
4. **GHOST RECON: ISLAND THUNDER**
5. **MECH ASSAULT**
6. **LINKS 2004**
7. **RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN**
8. **CRIMSON SKIES: HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE**
9. **PHANTASY STAR ONLINE EPIQUE II**
10. **ESPN NFL FOOTBALL 2004**







# ON THE DL

The newest Xbox Live downloadable content, served hot



## DESERT STORM II: BACK TO BAGHDAD

**DOWNLOAD:** New troop outfits: U.S. Woodland (standard), Counter-Terrorist (black), Iraqi Republican Guard (camo), and British DPM (camo).

**WHY IT'S COOL:** Each new uniform gives your squad of elite commandos a striking new look as they fight their way across the desert sands to take out the enemy threat: bad fashion sense!

**Tonight on Queer Eye for the Straight Soldier:** "Oh these new getups are absolutely fabulous! And none of them even clash with our great big guns!"



## STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

**DOWNLOAD:** Trandoshan Race and Yavin Station additions.

**WHY IT'S COOL:** It's more Star Wars. It's more quality Star Wars. It's the game of the year. Duh. Visiting an Old Republic support station inhabited by a Rodian hermit peddling his wares is the stuff of classic Star Wars.

**Useless fact:** As evidenced by Greedo in the original Star Wars, Rodians are in fact the worst shots in the entire Galaxy.



## LINKS2004

**DOWNLOAD:** Breath-taking par 73, 7,263 yard Kapalua Golf Course now available! This download is considered to be "premium" content, and for this reason it costs an additional \$4.99.

**WHAT'S MORE:** Also, the new Ocean Mill Director's Cut course is now available. Every hole has changed, but the par score of each hole has remained, and hundreds of yards have been added to be overall length of the course. This makes a total of 11 courses available for Links 2004.



## DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION ULTRAMIX

**DOWNLOAD:** Song Packs 2 and 3 now available, at a premium content price of \$5 each.

**WHY IT'S COOL:** Because if there's anything wrong with DDR, it's that the music is limited. Some excerpts: Naoki ("Battle Breaks," "Dynamite Rave"), Divas ("Baby Baby Gimmie Your Love"), Asleatics ("Fire Dub"), and L.E.D. ("Something Wonderful"). Okay, so who are we kidding, the music is still limited...



## RAINBOW SIX 3

**DOWNLOAD:** Meat-packing plant, free download.

**WHY IT'S COOL:** Fans of Rainbow Six 3 should hop onto Live to pick up this newly-released downloadable map. The "Meat Packing Plant" is the third downloadable extra map for the game; like the first two Xbox Live downloads, this is another map ported over from its PC counterpart, *Raven Shield*. And, like the rest of *Rainbow Six 3*, it's been substantially redesigned for play on the Xbox.

## POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE: TRUE STORIES FROM XBOX LIVE

Just adding to the chorus of infuriated consumers. You should see the hoops people are jumping through to make their connections satisfy the insane requirements of *Steel Battalion: Line of Contact*, when it's obviously a problem resulting from software issues that need to be fixed by Capcom. Of course, this wouldn't be so bad if Capcom/USA wasn't blowing everyone off. Oh, great bearer of truth, go forth and spread the fires that will cleanse this heresy! —tentaclesx

Essentially, Capcom's official response blames the problems on users' subpar connection speeds. Here's a direct quote: "In Contact there is a feature which automatically measures all participants' connections speeds while participants are in the lobby. After a fixed period of time, this feature automatically disconnects a client from the host if their internet connection quality does not satisfy connection speed requirements. As slow connection speeds tend to interrupt game play, this feature has been implemented in order to ensure a smooth and enjoyable gaming experience for all users." Standard broadband connections not fast enough? It's clear that poor network code is the cause for these problems; Capcom claims it will be performing server maintenance on a daily basis to improve matters. Given the current state of affairs, however, color us unconvinced.

# XBOX LIVE FOR DUMMIES

**XBN's** official guide to a prosperous online experience

## 4 THINGS YOU NEED TO GET ONLINE



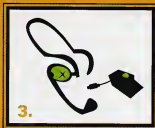
### BROADBAND INTERNET ACCESS

Xbox does not accept 14.4K dial-up. Most ISPs work swimmingly—with AOL's high-speed cable service being one of the few exceptions. You'll also need a router, if you want your PC to coexist with your PC online.



### A CREDIT CARD

Xbox does not accept personal checks or gold shillings, so make sure you have your credit card handy. We'd make a joke here about Master Chief never leaving home without his assault rifle right now, if we were so inclined, but, fortunately, we're not.



### AN XBOX LIVE STARTER KIT

These come in various flavors and sizes, but 70 bucks will get you an Communicator headset, a one-year subscription to Xbox Live, and a copy of the MechWarrior-inspired shoot-'em-thon *Mech Assault*. (Note: It's 50 bucks a year after that.)



### THE ABILITY TO ENTER DATA INTO YOUR XBOX

Name, home address, credit card info...a few more things and you're ready to roll. Literally, 10 minutes and you're done dealing with it forever. Simple. Easy. Delicious. Xbox Live.

## 4 THINGS YOU CAN DO ON XBOX LIVE



### TALK TO YOUR FRIENDS

It's an easy way to talk to your pals, without pesky things like "telephones" or "phone bills." There's an ever-so-slight lag at times, but this is the best way we know of to cheat the system.



### MAKE NEW FRIENDS (AND ENEMIES)

Making friends is easy...especially when you can't see them or be seen yourself. It may sound creepy, but anonymous voice chat is a whole new way to socially interact. (You freak.)



### DOWNLOAD NEW CONTENT

New levels, scenarios, items, and characters are available every week—just check [www.xboxlive.com](http://www.xboxlive.com) for daily scoops. Alternatively, check out XBN's On the DL (page 43) for monthly updates.



### PLAY THE GAMES

Duh. With over 70 games and 750,000 subscribers online as of January 1, 2004, the Xbox Live community will keep on growing. If you haven't joined already, now is the time—just be sure to leave your expletive filter at home.

## XBN EDITOR CHALLENGE

**1.** Day or night, rain or shine, land or sea, the *Xbox Nation* editors are here to accept your feeble challenges. We promise to beat, main, shoot, outplay, outrun, or outdance any and all comers; this is not a threat, but rather a grim reality. Tread lightly, ye contestants.

**// CHE CHOU**  
Gamertag: **cheXBN**  
"@#%\$% Capcom! Fix that 5% &@ Steel Battalion! Line of Contact!"

**// GREG ORLANDO**  
Gamertag: **Motis**  
"The psychics predict you will have a very, very bad day."

**// EVAN SHAMOON**  
Gamertag: **Giantmecha**  
"Oddly, online games make my jowls itch."

**// DAVID CHEN**  
Gamertag: **RastaGundam**  
"If you don't eat your meat, you can't have any pudding!"

**// SIMON COX**  
Gamertag: **Coxy**  
"God save the queen."

**// CINDY LUM**  
Gamertag: **XXXbn**  
"If I ever get DSL, there's going to be trouble."

**// ANDREW BURWELL**  
Gamertag: **Andrew XBN**  
"Next time I see you in Line of Contact, you'll be forced to take my smooth bore."

**// ANDREW MENDOZA**  
Gamertag: **BeatsNrice**  
"Talk nerdy to me. UNIX is power!"

Note: *Xbox Nation* does not accept responsibility for the hurt feelings and/or poor win-loss records of its victims.





# FINALLY, FANTASY GROWS UP

LEGEND HAS IT *FABLE* IS ALMOST  
READY. *XBN* TELLS THE TALE. Words:  
Greg Orlando

**Yuna. Rikku. Payne. The *Final Fantasy X-2* women on PlayStation 2, literally, are the clothes they wear. Dress them up right and they'll become thieves, sorcerers, gunslingers, or sword-wielding ass kickers. When they learn skills, they're directly applicable to the outfits they've got on. When a heroine needs to switch her vocation—say, from wizardess to thief, all that's required is a costume change and a smoothly rendered cut-scene.**

**That is not *Fable*. That is not *Fable* at all. In *Fable*, the game formerly known as *Project: Ego*, what you are is a reflection of what you've done in the world. Clothes, be they fancy or sackcloth, are just for wearing.**

The final countdown for *Fable*, the oft-hyped but seldom-seen-in-motion Xbox RPG from Peter Molyneux and Simon and Dene Carter's Big Blue Box Studios, has begun. Molyneux promises it will be finished and available this summer. Jokingly, he says he's not saying which hemisphere's summer *Fable* will be released in.

"It's close," he says, "but not quite finished." He's

come from England to America's Sin City to receive an award from the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences at the annual D.I.C.E. show and is using the opportunity to show off this, his first console title. A swank suite—publisher Microsoft is nothing if not possessed of deep pockets—at the Bellagio hotel plays host to the *Fable* festivities.

This time, Molyneux comes bearing box art for the game. Its central image is of a small, spiky-haired boy staring down in wonder at a pool of water. Gazing back from the pool is a reflection of an older, longer-haired, and decidedly more evil-looking man. The man is smirking back at the boy. It is the smirk of a man who wants to sell you a time-share while simultaneously reaching into your pocket to steal your keys.

## **Kid, you're going places!**

*There's a great hero standing on the hill. He's looking out, and people have come to see him. They're waving and cheering...*

Here's how to shatter a kid's perfectly good hero fantasy daydream: Remind him he's still a child. Then tell him he's got to go out and earn money to buy his sister a birthday present.

Out in town, a series of chores awaits. It'll take three gold pieces to buy a present, and dad promises to give one can for every job completed. But the great truth is that work sucks like a Hoover vacuum, and there are easier ways to earn some gold.

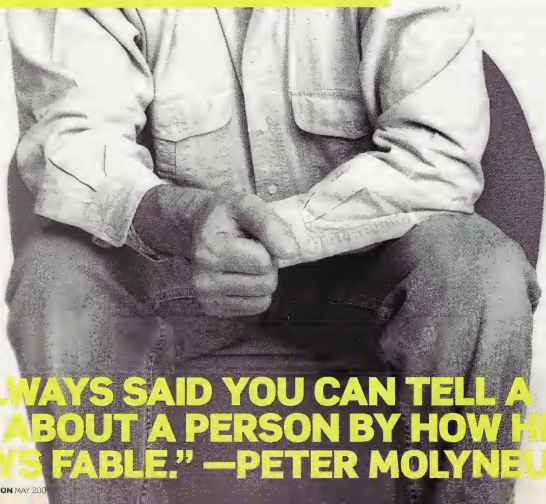
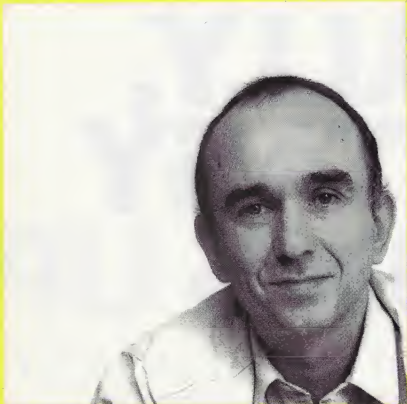
"Right from the very outset we want to pose this sort of moral choice," Molyneux says. While it's impossible to become wretchedly evil as a child,

there are definite opportunities for nastiness: Characters can be blackmailed, promises made and then not kept, defenseless children pummeled. An alignment meter tracks the main character's good and evil deeds; as an adult, it will be possible to tell a hero's bent by looking at his face. Evil characters will grow horns and attract flies. Saintry ones will beam and may have butterflies hovering around their bodies.

In *Fable*, characters will age and mature, but players won't have to wait for their heroes to grow into adulthood. Tragic circumstances leading to the disappearance of the main character's parents thrust the story forward, and the adventure begins in earnest as players rejoin the action as a novice adventurer fresh from hero training.

A reputation as a great hero or villainous scum won't carve itself out. A guild serves as the game's central hub; it's where quests, be they optional or plot advancing, can be selected. Completed quests mean a nice cash reward, and players can gamble that reward by making boasts. A hero can proclaim, say, that he'll complete an escort mission without losing a single person under his care. Or, he can take the absurdist route and declare he'll defeat all enemies using a frying pan. The more boasts he makes and successfully holds true to, the more his reputation grows.

*Fable*'s world breathes and pulses. Time passes. Children in town go to school in the morning, they play in the schoolyard in the afternoon, they go to bed at night. Forcibly removing bandits from a series of woods means wandering traders will be



**"I ALWAYS SAID YOU CAN TELL A LOT ABOUT A PERSON BY HOW HE PLAYS FABLE." —PETER MOLYNEUX**



Despite the box-toting, this is no Shenmue.



Lift that large. Tote that box. You'll be a low people, and you land to fall.



more likely to take up residence there. Wives will become cross when the great hero doesn't bother to return home for a long time. Other heroes will come and go, perform great deeds, be cheered in the pubs and taverns.

As an adventurer, players can tackle Fable as they will. It's possible to become a trader, totting goods across the land with the intent to buy low and sell high. Women can be wooed, children—*ahem*—produced. Stores and houses can be bought. It's possible to become a land baron in the most evil way imaginable. "You can slaughter three-quarters of the population," Molyneux says. "You can then buy a house in that area, and the house prices will have gone down because there's loads of available realty. Then you can wait for the town to become repopulated, which raises house prices. Then you can get married as well, which raises the value of your house,

and then get a bit more famous to further raise the property rate."

It's possible to do all those things, but at its core, Fable holds two things sacred: its combat system and the notion that a character's actions determine the kind of hero he becomes.

### A-beating we will go

"We really spent a long, long time—years—trying to get a combat system that is as simple as it could possibly be," Molyneux says. "One of the design criterion I had was, imagine I walked into a room and I didn't know anything about Fable and someone was halfway through the game: If I picked up a controller, I should be able to go into a fight and have a cool time."

One button controls attacks in Fable, with the third successive hit unlocking a special flourish hit. Flourishes can be activated by a second button press and will vary depending on the hero—

Molyneux's warrior, a beefy, barbarian sort, performs an overhead-stab flourish move. A third button allows a hero to block incoming strikes, and it'll be possible to switch between weapons by pressing the Xbox controller's White button. Spells can be called up on the fly from a menu, and up to four enchantments can be mapped to hotkeys. In a fight, it's possible to cut off someone's head with a sword strike, then quickly use a time-warping spell that gorgeously turns everything but the main character black and white, switch to a bow, hold down the Attack button to increase the arrow's power so that it goes through two targets, and then zap a final enemy with lightning bolts.

For dedicated players, Fable holds a combat multiplier enabling a hero to gain a lot of experience by stringing together successive hits, be it with a melee weapon, a ranged one, or magic

### An interesting psychological experiment

"I always said you can tell a lot about a person by how he plays Fable," Peter Molyneux says. When Mark MacDonald, executive editor for Xbox Nation's sister publication *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, opts to aid a small child being taunted by a bully in Fable's early moments, Molyneux smiles broadly. He says, "There is this interesting psychological experiment I've found. American [journalists] always want to do good—absolutely, 100 percent of the time. German [journalists] always want to do the evil stuff, without any doubt at all. They would be beating up that little kid to a pulp now as we talk."



# FABLE

COVER STORY



Sometimes justice must wear a goofy skullcap, unbuttoned vest, and short pants. Sometimes justice is downright silly.



## Will Fable change everything?

Fable will not dramatically change the landscape for games, nor will it shatter anyone's perceptions of the way things should be. What Fable does, and does remarkably well, is promise players an experience that's rather unique in console games. It really is, as Peter Molyneux says, a sort of personality quiz and psychology experiment set in a gorgeous medieval playground. It demands that a person make moral decisions and live with the consequences, but even more so, to bear witness—be it on their characters' faces or on the game's landscapes—to the effects of their choices.

spells. Molyneux says, "If you are really into being a great fighter, you are rewarded much, much more with the experience. But if you can't be bothered to do that, you can just go in there and hack and slice."

Accumulated experience can be used to buy skills and spells. Experience points are both general and specific: Use a lot of magic and you'll gain experience that can then be put toward mastering the arcane arts. Three separate categories exist here: combat, skills, and pure (magic), and a hero's appearance will change as these are emphasized or ignored. Warriors will become big and burly. Skillful heroes will become toned. Sorcerers will lose their hair but gain an aesthetically pleasing swirl of light around them.

## If it moves, celebrate it

Known more for its ideas than its look, Fable nonetheless seems no

graphical slouch. Its monsters, including a huge rock golem and the lithe, angular balverines (think werewolves) show off great detail, right down to the moss on the living boulder's body. The game's woods and winding paths, lit by a waning moon, are suitably dark and foreboding. Molyneux says, "We really wanted to start it off with this little pastoral English village and then have players realize the outside world's a lot darker and scarier place." Mission accomplished.

As the demonstration progresses, the hero shows off the expressions he's learned in his travels, laughing at a poor peasant's request for aid and then following it up with the near-universal symbol for ill will, the middle finger. Later, in the schoolyard, children will run screaming from the evil wretch. "I want to go home!" one child wails. One brave lad runs up to the main

character—now clad only in his underwear—to kick his shins.

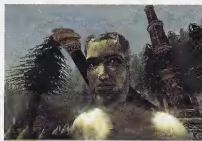
Time soon grows short, and Molyneux, in an attempt to get it all in, resorts to telling instead of showing: Players can buy titles and tattoos for their hero's body. There will be a prison scene requiring an escape without tools or weaponry; every successive failure ages the main character one year. Anyone in the game, if they trust the hero, will follow him on his adventures. "They'll comment on things you do," Molyneux says. "If you run away, they'll laugh at you. If you're going somewhere dark and scary, they'll get scared."

Players will have a big choice at the tale's conclusion, Molyneux remarks cryptically, and the end of Fable will mark the end of its story, but not of the game itself. There will be a sequel, most likely, because, as everyone knows, the truly great tales never end. //



# 30 MINUTES WITH FABLE

XBN'S GREG ORLANDO SPENDS QUALITY TIME WITH PETER MOLYNEUX AND HIS NEVER-ENDING STORY



## 0.01 Choose your own adventure

Peter Molyneux grins, "It's close, but not quite finished," he says about *Fable*. It's slated to come out this summer, and already the game has been pared back: A multiplayer mode has been excised, at least until *Fable 2*. You play the role of a hero from young boy to adulthood and, Molyneux says, you'll have lots of opportunities to be nice or nasty, buy tons of stuff (including houses, titles, and stores), get married, have kids, and become the greatest hero in the world—or a degenerate worm people would rather stab than deign to spit on.



## 0.05 The hero as a small boy

Even as a cute young boy, the protagonist in *Fable* will be posed with moral choices. He's got to buy a present for his sister, but does he earn his money or swipe it? When he catches a man kissing a woman who's most definitely not his wife, does he tattle or keep silent? If he keeps silent and earns a coin in the process, does he then run off to tell the man's wife? Which side, if any, will he choose when he meets a bully who's tormenting a small child, stealing the kid's teddy bear in the process? And what happens when the sister in question turns out to be a jerk? Decisions, decisions.



## 0.07 No good deed...

Things are not as simple as they seem. Sure, an alignment meter checks off a player's good deeds against the foul ones, but what happens when the hero commits a crime, but no one's there to see it? Or when does a good deed—defending a defenseless boy from an assault by a bully—become a bad one? As the hero becomes good or evil, his face will change, giving him an angelic glow or devil horns. In-game characters will react to heroes depending on their level of fame and alignment. This evil chap, it seems, won't be invited to any proms.



## 0.11 You're the man now, dog!

As an adult, the hero can use magic, ranged or melee weapons, or his fists to brawl with such wretches as bandits, creepy werewolf-like baelverines, and enormous rock golems (see that handsome chap above). Ranged weapons and spells can be charged by holding down the Attack button; hold down the button for the bow long enough and an arrow will be powerful enough to go through two enemies. Sixteen magic disciplines, each with four-to-seven different levels, will be available, some exclusive to evil or good sorcerers.



## 0.14 Skill or be killed

There's no way around it, brawling makes up a lot of *Fable*'s gameplay, and it's critical the game gets it right. "It has to be a really cool combat system," Molyneux says. Simple to use, the combat system lets players shift between weapons and spells with one button. Melee attacks can be used with one button, too, but after three hits on a foe, special flourishes can be added for extra killing power. Some flourishes will involve decapitations, while others will have the hero leaping in the air to stab foes.



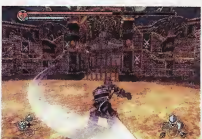
## 0.19 Follow me, I'm the Pied Piper

Wandering traders aren't going to escort themselves to safety. A hero can choose his own quests and how he tackles them. Boasting allows him to gamble on the outcome of his challenges, and here he's predicted he'll complete his journey without a single trader losing his life. But why is the baelverine in human form coming along? And wouldn't it be nice to protect the traders only to kill them and steal their loot once they've reached a safe haven? Sometimes it's quite good to be bad. And even better to be downright evil.



## 0.23 None more evil

Peter Molyneux pauses his demonstration to tell the delightful story of a hero who wooed a mayor's lovely daughter, got in good with hizzoner himself, then laid his father-in-law out into the woods and—whoops!—one dead elected official. Then—whoops!—the daughter died, too, after being accidentally stabbed 27 times or so. It was a tragedy of unimaginable proportions leading to the hero accumulating a lot of wealth and power with a little bit—all right, a truckload—of applied evil. It can be done in *Fable*. And more...



## 0.30 In the Colosseum

There's more. So much more. Heroes will get tossed in prison and will have to escape without tools or weapons. An arena fight will pit the main character against hordes of horrible enemies and, finally, against his friend. A torture chamber awaits for players who want to lure unsuspecting people into it. Competing heroes will try to steal a warrior's thunder—and his gold. And yes, it will even be possible for the game's main character to scare schoolchildren while wearing only a pair of Union Jack underwear.

# HANDS-ON

PSI-POPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY





# PLAYING WITH FIRE

Combining psi powers to best the boss



**1** These ancient Chinese statues certainly aren't going to destroy themselves. While taking cover behind a stone pillar, you realize that unloading buckshot and pumping hot lead certainly isn't helping your cause. What to do about these tenacious foes?



**2** Liu Bei and Yao Ming here manage to shatter the pillar you were hiding behind. Now they're all up in your face, and your bullets still aren't doing jack. That's when it hits you (or rather, them): Use telekinesis to slam these stonors with pieces of the pillar they shattered.



**3** Ah, telekinesis—how you love it so. Whereas your guns have failed, using your psi powers to hurl massive granite blocks at these statues proves effective. After taking down one of the statues, you decide to use its own body parts against its stoney brothers.



**4** Although telekinesis worked better than your firearm, these statues are still tearing you a new a-hole. That's when you decide to give pyrokinesis a go. Burning these statues stops them momentarily, exposing them even further to your telekinetic attacks.



**5** Playing with fire pays off big time and those golems crumble to pieces. Then, and perhaps not totally unexpectedly, that Chinese babe you have the hots for suddenly transforms into a major bitch and bursts into the room—tentacles, ball sack, and all.



**6** Her ugliness startles you at first, but by now you know what to do. Telekinetically hurl various pieces of debris (left over from your previous battle) at her tiny tentacled heads while dodging her lethal attacks. Let's hope she doesn't have a "final form."



malicious thoughts. Using Stryker's souped-up cerebellum, you are able to lift, drop, throw, and generally make a real mess of things, both living and inanimate, from a safe distance. The first time you walk into a room, pick up the first unlucky bastard to cross your path, and send him hurtling, flailing limbs and all, into a group of his army buddies, you're electrified with a genuine sense of giddiness.

What's more, the number of different things you can do just with telekinesis is staggering. Out of ammo? No problem—simply crack an enemy's skull against the adjacent wall; then, with Yoda-like stolidness, telepathically grab his assault rifle. Mounted wall-turrets giving you grief? (or use your enemy as a meat shield), block the turret's arc of fire with said object, and bust ass to safety. You can even hop onto and then levitate various items to rain down death from above. It's your own violent sandbox, and Psi-Ops literally lets you do as you see fit. With a total of six different psychic powers (see opposite sidebar), Psi-Ops plays like an escalating ego trip in digital dystopia.

In addition to telekinesis, you'll also acquire non-combative abilities to make it through the game's eight huge adventure-heavy locales. "While most of the environmental puzzles in the game allow players to use different powers and approaches to find solutions," says Eddy.



# PSYCHO ACTIVE

Playing mind games in Psi-Ops

"there are a few occasions when they will need to utilize a specific power or combination of powers to get by." Such cases require the use of skills like Remote Viewing, allowing you to go "out of body" and see through doors to plan out your breach. Or use the optional (but vital) talents such as Aura View, the supernatural ability to see elements, enemies, and clues that aren't visible in Psi-Ops' material world.

And then there's the huge variety of firearms in Psi-Ops, but we honestly don't see why you'd use them. "Traditional weapons and guns were always planned for the game," says Eddy. "In fact, in some of our early concepts we showed enemies being held in the air with telekinesis while Stryker shot at them with his machine gun." (Actually, we've confirmed that you can still carry out such acts of violence.) In order to maintain that balance of familiar genre territory with new gameplay experimentation, Eddy tells us that Psi-Ops' learning curve will be gentle yet necessarily enforced to get players in the mindset of psychic abuse.

"Generally, players that have played other third-person action-adventure games or first-person shooter games will find the controls in Psi-Ops easy [to handle]," says Eddy of the game's telepathic twist. But those of you weaned on weeks of addictive browbeating with the appreciatively difficult Ninja Gaiden will be happy to know that when played on its highest difficulty, Psi-Ops transforms into an entirely different—altogether strategic—

kind of experience. "Survival is tough and [the highest difficulty level] definitely requires players to use more stealth and finesse," says Eddy. This is especially true in later levels of the game, in which enemies are equipped with psi-resistant suits—that's when picking off individual enemies one by one while remaining stealthy becomes vital. In fact, according to Eddy, some of the members of the team actually prefer playing the game at higher difficulty levels.

To make things fair, Eddy explains how the A.I. in Psi-Ops remains realistic. "Our A.I. are aware of their environments, so they will hear and investigate sounds, will attempt to and destroy objects that you are using as cover, recognize when their buddies are being attacked, and go into alert mode so they are even more aware when something changes," he tells us. But more interesting is that the A.I. are also un-smart in all the right ways. "For instance, they can only see in front of them, so if you use telekinesis to throw something from behind, they will not dodge." In a time when there hasn't been psychic adventure to be found on any console in ages, there are suddenly two. Recently, developer Free Radical announced its psychically inspired *Second Sight*, to debut sometime this year. Eddy isn't so much worried as he is curious. "The description of the game does sound a lot like Psi-Ops," he tells us. "Once we see something more on *Second Sight*, probably well after Psi-Ops ships, we'll have more to say then." //

## TELEKINESIS

Use your gray matter to manipulate people and objects. Advanced usage allows you to combo this with other moves.

## PSYKINESIS

Just like the Prodigy song says, you are the fire starter. Set people and objects on fire like that one Kid does in X-Men United.

## MIND CONTROL

This technique lets you completely take over your enemies' bodies. Nifty tricks include forcing others to commit suicide.

## REMOTE VIEWING

Have an out-of-body experience with this skill. Look behind closed doors to strategize your next move.

## MIND DRAIN

A mind is a terrible thing to waste. But you've got no choice but to suck your enemies' brain juice to replenish your psi.

## AURA VIEW

Peer into the fourth dimension and pick up on clues, hints, and supernatural events by using your Aura View ability.

# FUTURE

PREVIEWS AND IMPRESSIONS MAY 2004

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## THIS MONTH

The calm before the storm...

Every year, the months leading up to E3—the game industry's annual celebration of itself—are characterized by a slow trickle of announcements from publishers who usually reserve their biggest titles for show-floor debuts. But

we're already starting to see some of the year's brightest stars. Criterion's superlative *Burnout 3* and 2015's *Men of Valor* stand out as undeniable pinnacles of their genres. Then there are the surprises—like the *Halo*-esque *Advent Rising*, action-hybrid *The*

*Red Star*, and the amazing-looking *FlatOut*—that swoop down from out of nowhere to kick us out of our complacent *Halo 2*-induced stupors. Dig the soothing calm this month and brace yourselves for a digital onslaught next issue. Here at *IGN*, it's all good—all the time.

## IN ROTATION: WHAT WE'RE PLAYING



### 1 Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy Xbox

We take back every cynical thing we've ever said about *Psi-Ops*. After spending time with this underhyped sleeper action title, we're...what's the word? Oh yes, psyched.



### 2 Unreal Tournament 2004 PC

*Unreal Tournament 2004* is undoubtedly the real deal when it comes to arena-style twitch action. Tune in next issue when we play the damn thing on Xbox Live!



### 3 Ninja Gaiden Xbox

Normally, we wouldn't list a title we're reviewing this issue as a game in rotation, but *Ninja Gaiden* is a wicked productivity killer, and one of the best action games ever made.



### 4 Painkiller PC

It's better than *Serious Sam* and nostalgic like *Doom*—it's *Painkiller* and we've been rockin' the PC demo. Keep an eye out for the Xbox version at an E3 near you.

## XPECTING

## XBN Readers' Top 5 Most Wanted Games

To own an Xbox is to wait for the next big thing. And in 2004, there are loads of big titles in the pipeline. Hit up our website ([www.xbnmag.com](http://www.xbnmag.com)) and let us know your most anticipated game of the year. Why? Because advocacy is fun.

1



## HALO 2

Microsoft / Sept. 2004

We're seriously considering just removing *Halo 2* from any sort of most wanted list. The game always wins by such a huge landslide, it's a bit scary really.



## FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

IQ / June 2004

*Warrior* suspiciously surged from zero to hero in the 11th hour. Regardless of whether its rise to the coveted second spot is legit, we're not entirely surprised. You love hardcore military sims.

2



3



4



## DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE

Tecmo / Late Summer 2004

Xbox darlings! At the moment Tomonobu Itagaki and Team Ninja follow up their brilliant *Ninja* aiden with *Dead or Alive Ultimate*, an Xbox Live-enabled repackaging of Tecmo's fighting franchise. *Ultimate* features the original unreleased (in the U.S.) version of *Dead or Alive*, along with a souped-up *Dead or Alive 2*.

## FABLE

Microsoft / July 2004

XBN's cover game got plenty of love this month as the RPG moves into the final stretch of its long overdue release. A storybook ending for Microsoft?

5



## RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2

Microsoft / Summer 2004

Color us surprised when *Rallisport Challenge 2* climbed steadily to fifth, knocking *Doom 3* flat on its gorgeous, satanic ass.





# BURNOUT 3

Fasten your seat belt, shorty

**No game on Earth satisfies the primal urge to cause catastrophic pileups on the open road as well as Criterion's superlative arcade racer, *Burnout 2*. The sequel to its sleepy, Euro-looking, pick-up-and-play predecessor, *Burnout 2* reinvented the phrase "sensation of speed" and set a hefty new standard for all other racers to beat. Sure, it isn't *Gran Turismo* on Xbox, but then again, who cares?**

XBN recently got hands-on with *Burnout 3*, Criterion's ambitious follow-up to its string of modern classics in the making. But just how

much more of a good thing do we really need? Matt Webster, the game's executive producer at Electronic Arts, the series' new powerhouse publisher, realizes the

creative dilemma and thinks he might have an interesting new direction for the franchise.

"I've always wanted to see an extension to the hooligan racing

vibe that the game has," he says. By hooligan racing, Webster is referring to the anarchic "drive offensively" attitude inherent in the series' gameplay. [*Burnout*]



## SYSTEM CRASH

Crash 'n' burn with the best of them

↳ The great thing about the *Burnout* series is that even when you lose the race by wrecking your car, you're rewarded with some of the most dramatic crash scenes

ever staged for video racing. *Burnout 3* ups the ante with all new destruction effects. "We watched a lot of movies and said, 'That's what we're going to do,'" says executive producer

Matt Webster. "With *Burnout 2* we were just getting started. This time we're working on ways to really smash up the car so you can practically tear the front or back off."







rewards you for all these [traffic] risks that you take, but I've always wanted to be able to mix it up with the cars that I'm racing against."

Based on our hands-on time with a few early tracks, *Burnout 3* gets deep into the mix. During the races, rival cars were surprisingly pissed-off, engaging in unprovoked bumping and grinding, crowding us into bridge supports and lane dividers. The intensity, and the AI's tenacity, is comparable to a three- to four-star police chase in *Grand Theft Auto III*.

To survive the vehicular onslaught, you'll have to learn ludicrously dangerous driving techniques. As in previous *Burnouts*, you earn "boost" (insane bursts of speed) for near-misses, driving on the wrong side of the road, sketchy corner drifts, and other white-knuckle maneuvers. In *Burnout 3*, the biggest boost bonuses come from creatively wrecking your fellow racers en route to the finish line.

"You really feel that you are hunting your opponents down," Webster says. And he's right: Technical racing and precision driving are all but thrown to the wind as nudging, blocking, tailgating, sideswiping, and other similarly rotten tricks occupy our mental focus. Like previous *Burnouts*, the game's surreal and precarious sense of velocity is still trance inducing, but this time, the proverbial zone you fall into is infinitely more bloodthirsty.

The payoff and inevitable tension release for *Burnout 3*'s over-the-top driving antics is, of course, the spectacular crash sequences. Expect similar crash mode challenge minigames, splitscreen competitive racing, and other goal-oriented variations to round out *Burnout 3*'s dizzying package. Driving offensively has never looked more appealing. //

Chris  
BUY DIGITAL: FUTURE: September



# TRON 2.0: KILLER APP

I'm the operator with my pocket calculator

▶ Some quick chronology: 1982: Disney releases the original *Tron* movie. The concept was great, the CG groundbreaking, and the film itself a bit uneven. 2003: Seemingly from nowhere, developer Monolith releases *Tron 2.0*, the game. The concept was great, the CG was groundbreaking, and the game itself a superbly designed adventure, garnering Game of the Year awards from the press. Now, Vivendi Universal is set to publish *Tron 2.0: Killer App* for Xbox, with a variety of exclusive online multiplayer modes.

#### So what kind of game is *Tron*?

Played primarily from the first-person perspective, it's something of a shooter/RPG hybrid. The game's plot references the same technology that got Alan Bradley (Bruce Boxleitner) and Kevin Flynn (Jeff Bridges) into such a pickle the

first time around. Players take the role of Jet Bradley, Alan's son, and will uncover a secret plot by the firm that insidiously employs his father to devise a new form of the digitization technology. In a failed attempt at stopping those involved, Jet is accidentally digitized and sent inside the computer world of *Tron*...and thus, a first-person shooter is born.

#### How's the game looking, then?

Sharp. The port appears to be going well, aside from some framerate issues that will hopefully be ironed out by the time the game comes out. The glow effect looks spectacular on a 480P-equipped set, and the concept of a war-ravaged computer system on the verge of collapse from a seemingly unstoppable army of corrupt

programs feels utterly relevant in today's virus-happy, Internet-fueled computer generation. If Climax can preserve the original concept and fine-tune its *Halo*-style controls, *Tron 2.0* has the potential to be an extremely solid title, on and off Xbox Live this fall. //

Chris

DEV: Climax; PUBL: Buena Vista; RFL: Full



## XBOX LIVE

And then there were 16...

↳ If you remember only one thing about the *Tron* movie, it's most likely the Disc Arena sequences, which ended up becoming the basis for the multiplayer element of *Tron 2.0* on PC. For the Xbox port, Climax Los Angeles is taking things one step further: *Killer App* will

support 16 players over Xbox Live, 16-player system link, four-player splitscreen, and 10 all-new multiplayer levels (on top of the original Disc Arena multiplayer mode). The developer has also acknowledged that movie (and single-player PC game's) lightcycle duels will show up in

multiplayer mode.

Another tidbit of information we've procured is that the game has been technically remixed somewhat for Xbox, sporting 480p HDTV support, 5.1 Dolby sound, and "faster gameplay" (which we're told means more shooting, less puzzling).



# RED NINJA: END OF HONOR

Fear the assassin, not her cleavage

Ask all Xbox gamers who own a copy of Tecmo's glorious opus *Ninja Gaiden* and they'll gladly testify: Ninjas are blowin' up on the spot. In a co-op effort between Japanese developer Tranji and film director Shinsuke Sato (*Princess Blade*), Vivendi's bringing you a very different (and perhaps slightly erotic) kind of ninja

experience on Xbox.

**Why are all ninja chicks dressed in such skimpy yukata?**

Because it puts the "ass" back into assassination? We don't know. But in *Red Ninja*, you play as Kurenai, a young ninja whose family was ruthlessly slaughtered by an evil clan. To exact her revenge, she's mastered the art of the Tetsugen,

a unique and deadly weapon made up of a thin steel wire and its various attachments.

**Sounds rather unconventional. So she doesn't carry a blade?**

No. But Kurenai's Tetsugen is a lot more fun to play with than your average sashimi knife. Thanks to the game's physics engine, she can use the steel wire in any number of creative ways during combat: Wrap it around an enemy's neck for a quick decapitation; hook it into one samurai, then run the wire around a group of foes to slice and dice multiple victims. Kurenai's Tetsugen also serves as a device for platform gameplay. Swing across chasms, hang upside-down for wicked stealth kills, or pull yourself up to higher ground for alternate routes.

**Still, *Red Ninja* sounds like it'll play like *Tenchu*...**

Yeah, but can Aiyame of *Tenchu* use her sex appeal to distract her enemies before the fatal caress? //



DEV:

DEV: Tranji PUB: Vivendi Universal REL: Fall



## ADVENT RISING

Under the radar and into our hearts

Everyone likes to think they're special, but in *Advent Rising's* sci-fi world (conjured up by *Ender's Game* author Orson Scott Card), you really are important: The human race is the stuff of creation myths, and a party of aurellians (nice aliens) has just landed on your planet to warn of seekers (naughty aliens) bent on wiping out your species, à la the Covenant in *Halo 2* fashion.

**Some kind of *Halo* clone, then?**

Although *Advent* looks like a typical sci-fi shooter, its ambitious game design and epic scope has us salivating. The game features massive vehicles, a targeting system that lets you fire at two targets simultaneously, and super-ninja-like abilities, such as running along walls and abusive telekinesis. Too good to be true? Find out next issue. //

DEV:

DEV: Glyph X PUB: Majesco REL: Fall





# 30

## MINUTES WITH...

### MEN OF VALOR

▶ Vietnam has become the gaming industry's latest military gold rush, with no fewer than five war-torn shooters slated for release in 2004. Though the subject matter treads along somewhat more tenuous political ground than did the Great War, the jungles of Southeast Asia serve, nonetheless, as fertile ground for exciting gameplay.

Of the Vietnam shooters this year, *Men of Valor* stands as the most impressive on many levels. Superb atmosphere, attention to period details, and immersive AI-driven gameplay combine to make *Valor* the shooter to beat in 2004. A comprehensive multiplayer mode (including co-op play) complements the single-player campaign, leaving us with the impression that 2015—many of whose employees developed the original *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* for EA before leaving to start their own company—is the real deal. But once game developers have milked Vietnam for all it's worth, what's next—Old West shooters and disco? //

#### Fatigues

Jungle warfare is all about camouflage and staying out of sight. To that end, *Valor* has, hands down, the best virtual jungles on Xbox.



DATE

MAY 2015 (MAY) VIVIANE RB, Fall

#### THAT '70S WAR

Race and that purple haze

▶ *Men of Valor* puts players in the mud-spattered boots of Dean Shepard, a black U.S. Marine who begins high school just as America's getting caught up in the bloody conflict. The game captures the war's culturally psychedelic and interracially tense politics with a series of moving letters Shepard writes to his parents, convincingly narrated between levels. An excerpt from the first of these letters: "Us black Marines mostly stick to ourselves and don't get bothered much. Lawrence Stiles (the guy we call 'Smooth') got in a shoving match with some white guys

about hitting in line at the

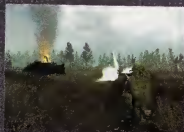
mess, but he's from Detroit and has a chip on his shoulder. I did make friends with a big white farm boy from Iowa who everybody calls Hoss, and he keeps most of the crackers off our backs." It seems safe to say that *Valor* will provide a significantly more thought-provoking narrative than anything EA's *Medal of Honor* series has ever done.

M21 Semi-

18/200



## TOUR OF DUTY



## MISSION 1

## Southwest of Da Nang

Our hands-on begins with us rolling down a dirt road just outside the city of Da Nang when our APC is forced to stop for several lines of Vietnamese farmers who are leading their water buffalo across the street. One of our guys jumps off to help them out and steps directly on a land mine. Boom—he disintegrates and within seconds chaos reigns. We drop behind the APC for cover and catch our breath (this is where the cut-scene ends) before grabbing our M16s and proceeding to chase the attacking Vietcong deep into the rice paddies, taking out as many as possible along the way. Fellow soldiers shout at one another in their regional dialects (in glorious M-rated detail, we might add), and enemies shout back with equal intensity.



## MISSION 2

## Mama, I Be a Junglist Soul Jah

With the Vietcong falling back due to mounting casualties, we give chase into a nearby forest. Now, deep in the jungle, we're suddenly forced to play our enemy's game. Thick brush, dense foliage, and hazy, humid air make it difficult to pick out targets, but the 480p HDTV resolution ensures we have a rather easy time observing both the impressive texture detail and fantastic atmosphere 2015 has built into this game. At a certain juncture, we call in an air strike. After an uneasy calm, American F4 Phantom II jet fighters break overhead and unleash jaw-dropping, bowel-shaking napalm that singes everyone and everything in its vicinity.



## MISSION 3

## Urban Gentrification

After some in-game R and R, we're asked by local Vietnamese Captain Nguyen Van Bao to help storm the Communist-occupied citadel of Hue in a drastic change of pace, we suddenly enter into urban warfare. Snipers do what they're paid to do, picking us off from rooftops, forcing us to use our environment for cover. We find ourselves hiding behind crumbled walls and fire-gutted cars and in bomb-baited ditches, waiting for the right moment to duck out and pop off a quick burst before ducking back for dear life. The enemies show off impressive A.I., and it seems 2015 has really pushed itself in the graphics department; Men of Valor has the finest fire and water effects we've ever seen—and all this on a console already brimming with impressive visual showpieces.



SKANK TANK

# URBAN DECAY

Sex, drugs, and fisticuffs. Five imminent games that will upset your folks.

## NARC

Insane in the membrane?

↳ Is anybody surprised in the least that gaming has finally reached NARC's point of sensationalist (im)maturity? Midway's latest digital crime spree puts you in the role of narcotics officers who fight a most literal war on drugs. But whereas *Grand Theft Auto III* let you pick up hookers and beat-up paramedics, NARC lets you snort coke, drop acid, chew mushrooms, and smoke kind bud. According to Midway's newly appointed CEO David Zucker, the game simulates the difficult position undercover cops find themselves in by blurring the lines between justice and temptation. **But...but...the FBI told me that only losers do drugs!**

Only losers—and gamers—apparently. As a third-person shooter/brawler, NARC replaces traditional gameplay abstractions like power-ups with morally ambiguous substances (aka drugs). It's an age-old device, really, started by none other than Shigeru Miyamoto and his groundbreaking adventure *Super Mario Bros.* The drug-rampant world of NARC is a strange, comical, satirical, and often wince-

inducing take on not just the M-rated action genre, but also the very culture of videogames itself.

**Aside from shock value, how does drug abuse affect gameplay in NARC?**

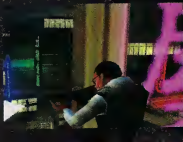
Taking drugs affects gameplay in many predictable ways. Blaze a doob before going into a bust, and everything slows down à la bullet time in *Max Payne*. Then there's methamphetamines, which makes you much faster on the draw but ultimately harder to control. To balance out advantages, the game punishes not only your health each time you do drugs, but also your reputation. When you've hit Harvey Keitel-esque lows à la *Bad Lieutenant*, you're kicked off the force.

**Why does NARC sound so familiar?**

Two reasons. First of all, the game is a spiritual remake of Midway's '80s classic shooter of the same name. Second, NARC is being developed by Vis, the very folks who brought you the uneven *State of Emergency* with the same engine. //

Crash

REV: Vis Interactive; P: R; Midway; HF: Fall





## MERCENARIES

Forget San Andreas—North Korea's blowin' up!

As the U.S. government would gladly testify these days, building new countries is rarely a simple affair. In Mercenaries, it's a downright bear—North Korea has fallen to a coup d'état, and all hell has broken loose in the one place on earth that perfectly exemplifies urban decay. You're a mercenary in the midst of all the instability, and as such, you have the option to fight for and against the North Koreans, the Chinese, the United Nations, and the Russian mafia.

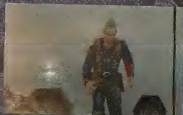
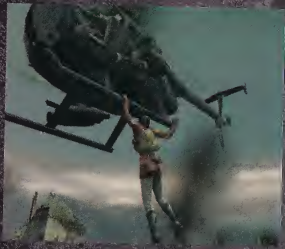
**What's with the Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas reference, then?**

Mercenaries isn't your typical military shooter. In fact—wait for it—the game plays a lot more like GTA: North Korea.

Similar to the deck of cards released by U.S. forces in Iraq last year, there are 52 missions in Mercenaries, each one with its own power monger for you to capture. **Will the soundtrack feature Ja Rule?** Probably not, but you can pretend it's playing in the background. You'll also need your imagination to figure out the best way to survive these open-ended combat missions. Someone holed up in a building? Simply jack a tank for one of 20 different machines, set the structure on fire, and, to paraphrase our commander-in-chief, "smoke 'em out of their holes."

DEV:

Pandemic, TALE, LucasArts, R.I.: Fall



## FIGHT CLUB

More violent than chess club

Beat the stuffing out of your fellow Xbox Live gamers later this year when you join Tyler Durden's underground Fight Club. This movie-licensed brawler features 10 primary and four hidden characters from the film, as well as a long list of signature and finishing moves. A gruesome real-time facial and skeletal deformation system makes you feel every devastating hit.

DEV:

Genuine Games, PUS, Vivendi, REL, Warner

## DRIV3R

Let's active driving!

We know we've already covered this game in the pages of XBN, but when you think "urban decay," no game looks more criminally appealing than Driv3R and its gorgeous open-ended cities. Taking place in scenic Miami, Nice, and Istanbul, Driv3R puts you behind the wheel of a getaway driver for organized crime. Sophisticated car and weapons physics make Driv3R a potential treat.

DEV:

Reflections, PUS, Alcatel, AOL, June

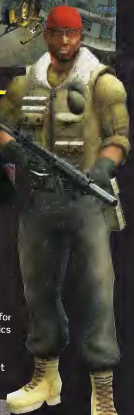
## MANHUNT

Man bites dog

Gratuity, thy name is Manhunt. Ported over from PlayStation 2 is last year's shock-value stealth game Manhunt, an ultravalent take on the genre Sam Fisher built. So what's new for Xbox? Well, aside from improved graphics and visual effects, not much. If you've already killed and killed again on your PS2, skip this one. Otherwise, check out the ultravalent review next issue.

DEV:

Rockstar North, PUS, Rockstar, PUS, April



# FLATOUT

Put the virtual pedal to the proverbial metal

◀ If someone from Bugbear Entertainment were ever to offer you a ride home, politely decline. Bugbear's been obsessed with vehicular mayhem for years, and its latest project, *FlatOut*, is ample evidence that the title is an accident waiting to happen. In the broadest stroke, *FlatOut* is a rally game.

**Another rally game for Xbox?** Well, yeah. But *FlatOut* isn't your typical rally racer. Most fans know where to look for realistic rally sims (Mr. Colin McRae, step right up). *FlatOut* brings to the sport a dirty junkyard vibe with its emphasis on smashable vehicles and interactive arenas. Not to be outclassed, *FlatOut* also features all the depth of a truly customizable garage mode standard with any serious racing game; you can buy, sell, upgrade, and tune your ride as you see fit. *FlatOut*'s multiplayer competition (up to eight players on Xbox Live) boosts it into the same league as

the rest of the big boys on Xbox. So why should you bother with a new game when Mr. McRae has been so nice to you all these years? It's all in the destruction.

**More chaos than *RallSport Challenge 2* and *Burnout 3*?**

Bugbear appears intent on delivering a racing experience that's heavy on the destruction factor—in particular, with vehicular damage

modeling that affects both appearance and performance. Interaction with your surroundings also comes into play (note the randomly placed stacks of tires in the screenshot). In *FlatOut*, every action has an appropriate and most brutally realistic reaction.

**So, how much can I save on my auto insurance by switching?** You'll be lucky to walk out with the

complimentary keychain. Lastly, cars aren't the only objects that sustain damage during the race. Fans of David Cronenberg and automobile accidents should sit down for this one: In *FlatOut*, the health of the driver can deteriorate if he or she endures a nasty crash. Sexy! //

Check

DEV: Bugbear; PUB: Kingpin; REL: Fall



## B.J. and the Bugbear: *FlatOut* and its hyper-reality

↳ In a recent interview with racing simulation website Blackhole Motorsports, developer Bugbear cites *Half-Life 2* as the point of departure for its latest rally title, *FlatOut*. "While all of us are hardcore racing fans, we were in fact looking at the recent developments in the first-person

shooter genre, where physics and interactive environments are fast becoming a norm," the developer says. To that end, *FlatOut* combines racing gameplay with an open-ended sandbox design philosophy to produce infinitely new experiences each time you play. "You can actually use the

environment to your advantage," Bugbear says. "Given that everything on these tracks is both dynamic and persistent, you'll never know what the track is going to look like for the next lap. After crashes, there might be someone's hood, door, or windshield lying on the track."





# THE RED STAR

## Back in the U.R.R.S.

Publisher Acclaim moves bravely into the artsy side of licensing with its latest hipster comic book acquisitions *100 Bullets* and *The Red Star*. While *100 Bullets* looks disappointingly like your average third-person shooter, *The Red Star* is a genre-bending action title begging for exploration. **So what is *The Red Star*?**

This indie comic series is a powerful war epic set in the United Republics of the Red Star, an alternate-reality version of the U.S.S.R. complete with lumbering tanks, bombed-out

Siberian cityscapes, and techno-magical sorcery powered by ghosts. It's a compelling world ripe for gameplay, and one from which the folks at Acclaim Austin chose to carve a relentless shooter/brawler hybrid.

**How does all this work itself into *Star*, the game?**

From the outset, you have the choice of three heroes: Maya, a sultry sorceress-general; Kyuzo, her powerful bodyguard; and Makita, a punky freedom fighter. Each commands a unique arsenal of

weapons, skills, and magic, and you'll be able to purchase new weapons between the massive, action-packed stages.

**Sounds really old school. They still make games like this?**

The gameplay concept here can't be summed up as, say, "*Grand Theft Auto III* meets iron-fisted totalitarianism." Instead, *Star* resurrects elements of old-school beat-em-ups like *Golden Axe*, *Final Fight*, and *Contra* to create a visceral, arcade-style action game. You're thwacking enemies with giant

weapons, tossing thugs over railings, unloading machine gun rounds into sub-bosses, and teaming up with a buddy to coordinate simultaneous special attacks. It feels like some modern iteration of vintage quarter-munching action titles...if arcades still existed.

**What's with all those crazy bullets in the screenshot?**

*Star* even tosses in a not-too-subtle nod to Treasure's ultra-hardcore GameCube blaster *Ikurazga*: Boss encounters fill the screen with multicolored bullets that must be alternately dodged and absorbed. One doesn't generally expect such sincere flattery from an American developer. Watch for this rising star.

## CONKER: LIVE & UNCUT

### Uncircumcised for extra filth

How much faces and foul language can \$375 million buy, exactly? A whole lot, as evidenced by Rare's mature-themed third-person adventure *Conker: Live & Uncut*. Starring cartoon rodent Conker, *Live & Uncut* is everything you could ever want—from an Nintendo 64 retread, that is.



**So what the [bleep]?**

*Uncut* contains the whole of the Nintendo 64 title *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, including what Microsoft promises is uncensored content that didn't make it into the original.

**Are you sh'tting me?**

Would we do such a thing? Rare has also augmented its old game with some new Xbox Live content. Goal-oriented, team-based play has been implemented for up to 16 rodent warriors. One heist mode has four teams racing to rob a bank, while another space-themed contest features a free-for-all against other teams and rampaging aliens. We hope it'll be the [bleeping] shirt.

**DATA**

DEV: Rare; PUBL: Microsoft; RGL: Fall



**DATA**  
DEV: Acclaim; PUBL: Acclaim; RGL: September





## MEGA BITS

Little satellites of love on the horizon



## Shrek 2

➤ The first Shrek anime not very good at all. Which is why it isn't entirely difficult for Luxoflux's Shrek 2 to look hundreds of times better than its predecessor. In this comparatively impressive sequel, you play as Princess Fiona, Donkey, Gingerbread Man, Puss-in-Boots, and, of course, gruff Shrek. Fun minigames see players performing timing-based challenges based loosely on the plot of the forthcoming flick. //

DATA

DEV: Luxoflux Corp. PUB: Activision REL: Summer

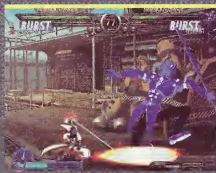


## Street Racing Syndicate

➤ OK, so maybe you think like a street racer. It's just soooo 2-D, but for all its glossy fluorescent beauty, did *Need for Speed Underground* let you wager your girlfriend as the prize for winning a race? No. But Syndicate does, and it does it with unabashed gusto. Sexism and realism are alive and well in this slick urban racer set in actual stretches of Los Angeles and other SoCal hot spots. //

DATA

DEV: Bethesda; PUB: Namco; REL: Fall

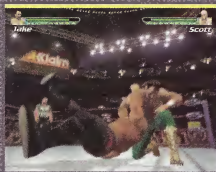


## Guilty Gear XX: Reload

➤ What's the point in calling a game something like, uh, *Guilty Gear* if it has nomenclature notwithstanding, die-hard duellists will surely relish the chance to play the latest revision of Arc System Works' chaotic 2D fighter over Xbox Live. Oberfluid animation, wonderfully cheesy butt rock tunes, and one all-new character, Robo-Ky, await the faithful U.S. gamers who have to wait until late summer to do battle. //

DATA

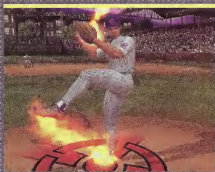
DEV: Arc System Works; PUB: Sammy (Japan); REL: Summer

Showdown:  
Legends of Wrestling

➤ If you're a gamer pushing 30, there's a good chance that the novelty of pro wrestling faded long before the advent of "superstars" like The Rock. Yet you feel a strange affinity for Andre the Giant and Rowdy Roddy Piper. Fear not—now you can relive those pathetic passions with *Showdown*. Seventy-three classic brawlers, pick-up-and-play gameplay, tons of options, and sweaty nostalgia make this slightly appealing. //

DATA

DEV: Acclaim Austin; PUB: Acclaim; REL: June

MLB SlugFest:  
Loaded

➤ For all those who ever thought that what the American pastime needed was hydrocephalic players who catch fire while running the bases, *MLB SlugFest: Loaded* is heaven on earth. Over-the-top yet easy-to-pick-up baseball action returns to Xbox in 2004, this time with a deep franchise mode and online play via Xbox Live. Abner Doubleday would be pleased—but only if he really liked the big-head mode. //

DATA

DEV: Midway; PUB: Midway; REL: June

Harry Potter and  
the Prisoner of Azkaban

➤ Murderous wizard Sirius Black busts out of Azkaban prison and comes punning for young Harry Potter. As Potter and his sorcerer pals Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley, players must uncover a fiendish mystery in three dimensions, all the while battling evil dementors and quite possibly the devilish Lord Voldemort himself. Expect lots of hippogriff riding and expiation aided and abetted by the Marauder's Map. //

DATA

DEV: Electronic Arts; PUB: Electronic Arts; REL: Spring

## Microsoft's new MMORPG

Whodathunk Microsoft killed its in-the-works massively multiplayer online role-playing game *Mythica* earlier this year, only to acquire Sigil Games Online, developer of Vanguard: Saga of Heroes for the PC. Vanguard, very much a game in the fantasy MMORPG genre, is created by EverQuest veterans Brad McQuaid and Jeff Butler. Could Vanguard be Xbox Live's other big MMORPG?



## Sudeki Days

Microsoft recently dropped off a playable version of their action RPG *Sudeki*. Look for a detailed hands-on report next month.



## Red Dead Revolver

This formerly Angel Studios is now Rockstar. San Diego-developed, formerly Capcom, now Rockstar-published third-person shooter is going west, young man. Players shoot up sun-bleached ghost towns, chase after trains on horseback, and generally raise hell with more than 30 weapons from six shooters to sticks of dynamite. Split-screen multiplayer modes may make this game worth wanting, dead or alive. //

DUEX

DEV: Rockstar San Diego PUS: Rockstar REL: April



## Gotcha!

It's all paint, folks, not really. Here we have Gotcha!, a first-person shooter based on the popular sport of paintballing, a pastime that, in and of itself, simulates the rush of a firefight. So what? Gotcha!, in essence, is a simulation of a simulation. So why would anybody play this thing? Well, for the opportunity to splatter your opponents in a skyscraper or medieval castle run, of course. //

DUEX

DEV: Sixteen Tons PUS: Take-Two REL: Fall

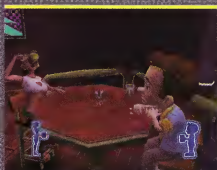


## Shadow Ops: Red Mercury

When diplomacy is not an option, turn to your Xbox. As a single-player game, *Ops* features plenty of in-your-face thrills you'd expect from a heavily prescribed first-person shooter experience. But the game's multiplayer modes (Escort the V.I.P., Plant the Bomb, etc.) on Xbox Live have us intrigued. Plus, the ability to use vehicles online seals *Ops* as a potential alternative to *Rainbow Six 3* on Live. //

DUEX

DEV: Zombie Studios PUS: Atari REL: Summer

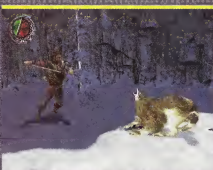


## Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude

*Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* adheres to the well-worn adage, "[There's] nothing like a little social lubricant to get a conversation going." A minigame-heavy adventure, *Laude* sees a college-age Larry hunting down true love from videogame women you wouldn't touch with a 25-foot pole if they existed in the real world ("Congrats, you [bleeping bleepbleep] one such hot tomatoe notes when her heart is won"). //

DUEX

DEV: High Voltage Software PUS: Sierra REL: Fall

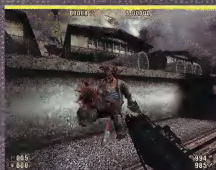


## The Bard's Tale

Back in 1985, there was a nifty RPG on ye olde Apple II and PC called *The Bard's Tale*. It was an inspired, me-too clone of genre originator *Wizardry*. Using Snowblind's *EverQuest* *Champions of Norrath* engine, and in the spirit of '80s revivalism, *ixile* is basing its latest third-person action RPG on this cult-classic license. Expect plenty of genre satire as well as nonlinear gameplay for loads of replay value. //

DUEX

DEV: ixile Ent. PUS: ixile Ent. REL: Winter



## Painkiller

"Heaven's got a hit man," the promo copy for this first-person shooter proclaims, and guesses what—it's you. Yes, you. You play as dead man Daniel Garner, a tough son-of-a-bitch who absolutely adores fighting scores of demonic beasts with his slightly gothic-looking shotgun and grenade launcher. *Painkiller* also features multiplayer on XboxLive, perfect for those craving some old-school *DukeWorld* action. //

DUEX

DEV: People Can Fly PUS: DreamCatcher REL: Fall



MONTHLY  
UPDATE

## HALO 2

## The secret lives of Bungie employees

Ever tight-lipped about the second coming of *Christ* and *Halo*, Bungie has nonetheless deemed its fans worthy of cryptic updates on the goings-on within its hallowed halls. Here are some golden *Halo 2* nuggets we've picked out from Frankie's weekly updates on the company's website:

- Halo 2 will feature advanced "lightmaps" that improve the game's real-time shading

techniques. You'll see greater, more intense contrasts between light and dark areas.

- Unlike in *Halo*, with 5.1 surround sound, you'll be able to tell exactly which direction a missed shot came from in both single- and multiplayer *Halo 2*.
- They're still tweaking the balance and feel for Master Chief's dual-weapon wielding. Sounds rather tricky. Hope they don't screw it up.
- "Gaze Tracking" is now in effect in

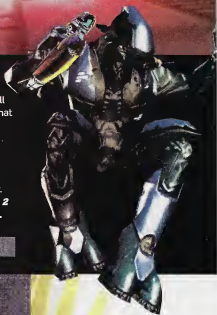
multipayer games, meaning you'll be able to tell who's gazing at what in their first-person rebicules.

- The team is currently hard at work on *Halo 2*'s single-player cinematics, including voiceover stuff in the studio, as well as creating animations for the story.

**More tasty morsels of *Halo 2* information next month. Sigh.**

CARTY

DEV: Bungie FUR: Microsoft REL: Winter



## JADE EMPIRE UPDATE

## Bruce Lee + Jet Li = Furious Ming

*Jade Empire* will undoubtedly be the biggest Xbox RPG in 2004. From the mouths of its creators, *XBOX* tracks the development of BioWare's Eastern expanse. This month, we take a quick look at the fast and furious Ming.

"Each of the player characters in

*Jade Empire* have their own unique abilities and were designed to represent specific fighting categories. The fast category represents moves that are quick and direct; they appeal to those of you who are action gamers. "Finesse" combat, in which you're seeking tactical advantages

through quick movements, describes this category. Each of the categories are represented by a male and female player character. Ming's female counterpart is Boxer Li. This deadly sexpot is proficient in combat as well... but I'll tell you more about Boxer Li in another diary down the road. As you can see in the screenshot, Ming looks young, energetic, and lean. Obviously, he represents the fast category. A warrior at heart, Furious Ming is just one of the seven interesting player characters you will control in *Jade Empire*."

—Rion Swanson, Artist, BioWare

CARTY

DEV: BioWare FUR: Microsoft REL: Winter





# Playlist

## WHAT'S COMING TO XBOX...AND WHEN

# FUTURE

PLAYLIST

GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE	LIVE
<b>100 Bullets</b>	Acclaim	October	No
<b>Advent Rising</b>	Majesco	September	TBA
<b>Alias</b>	Acclaim	April	No
<b>Area 51</b>	Midway	September	TBA
<b>Armada 2: Star Command</b>	Metro3D	TBA	No
<b>B.C.</b>	Microsoft	Fall	No
<b>Bard's Tale</b>	Acclaim	October	No
<b>BloodRayne 2</b>	Majesco	October	No
<b>Burnout 3</b>	EA	September	TBA
<b>Call of Duty: Finest Hour</b>	Activision	Fall	TBA
<b>Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers</b>	Acclaim	June	No
<b>Conker: Live &amp; Uncut</b>	Microsoft	Fall	Yes
<b>Daredevil</b>	Encore	Summer	No
<b>Darkwatch</b>	Sammy	December	Yes
<b>Dead or Alive Code: Cronus</b>	Tecmo	TBA	TBA
<b>Dead or Alive Ultimate</b>	Tecmo	Summer	Yes
<b>Dead to Rights II: Hell to Pay</b>	Namco	Fall	TBA
<b>Digimon Rumble Arena 2</b>	Bandai	May	No
<b>Doom 3</b>	Activision	Fall	Yes
<b>DRIV3R</b>	Atari	June	No
<b>DroneZ</b>	Metro3D	TBA	No
<b>Fable</b>	MS	Summer	TBA
<b>Far Cry</b>	Ubisoft	TBA	Yes
<b>Fight Club</b>	Vivendi	Winter	TBA
<b>FILA World Tour Tennis</b>	Xicat	TBA	No
<b>FlatOut</b>	Empire Interactive	Fall	Yes
<b>Full Spectrum Warrior</b>	THQ	June	Yes
<b>Funkmaster Flex's Digital Hits Factory</b>	XS Games	TBA	No
<b>Future Tactics: The Uprising</b>	Crave	Spring	No
<b>GoldenEye 2</b>	EA	TBA	TBA
<b>Guilty Gear XX #Reload</b>	Sammy	Fall	Yes
<b>Half-Life 2</b>	Vivendi	TBA	TBA
<b>Halo 2</b>	Microsoft	September	Yes
<b>Hardcore 4x4</b>	XS Games	TBA	No
<b>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban</b>	EA	Winter	No
<b>Headhunter: Redemption</b>	Sega	Fall	No
<b>Hitman: Contracts</b>	Eidos	April	No
<b>IndyCar Series 2005</b>	Codemasters	May	Yes
<b>Iron Phoenix</b>	Sammy	Fall	Yes
<b>Jade Empire</b>	Microsoft	Winter	No
<b>Juiced</b>	Acclaim	Fall	Yes
<b>Kameo: Elements of Power</b>	MS	September	No
<b>Kingdoms Under Fire: The Crusaders</b>	Phantagram	TBA	Yes
<b>Knights of the Old Republic 2</b>	LucasArts	TBA	TBA
<b>Legends of Wrestling: Showdown</b>	Acclaim	June	No
<b>Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude</b>	Vivendi	TBA	No
<b>Lobo</b>	Kemco	TBA	No
<b>Malice</b>	Bethesda	Fall	No
<b>Manhunt</b>	Rockstar Games	April	No
<b>Marvel vs. EA</b>	EA	Winter 2005	TBA

GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE	LIVE
<b>Maxxis ATV</b>	Metro3D	September	No
<b>MechAssault 2</b>	MS	Winter	Yes
<b>Men of Valor: Vietnam</b>	Vivendi	Winter	Yes
<b>Mercenaries</b>	LucasArts	TBA	TBA
<b>Metal Slug 3</b>	SNK	Fall	No
<b>Micro Mayhem</b>	Jaleco	April	No
<b>MLB SlugFest: Loaded</b>	Midway	April	Yes
<b>Mortal Kombat: Deception</b>	Midway	Fall	Yes
<b>MTV Music Generator 3</b>	Codemasters	May	No
<b>NARC</b>	Midway	August	No
<b>Operation Flashpoint</b>	Codemasters	Fall	Yes
<b>Painkiller</b>	DreamCatcher	Fall	Yes
<b>Pariah</b>	Groove Games	Fall	Yes
<b>Perfect Dark Zero</b>	Microsoft	TBA 2005	Yes
<b>Pilot Down</b>	DreamCatcher	TBA	No
<b>Plague of Darkness</b>	Namco	Fall	No
<b>Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy</b>	Midway	June	No
<b>Psychonauts</b>	Microsoft	Winter	No
<b>Pure Pinball</b>	XS Games	TBA	No
<b>RalliSport Challenge 2</b>	Microsoft	Summer	Yes
<b>Red Dead Revolver</b>	Rockstar	May	No
<b>Red Ninja: End of Honor</b>	Vivendi	Fall	No
<b>Scaler</b>	TDK	Winter	No
<b>Shadow Ops: Red Mercury</b>	Atari	June	Yes
<b>Shayde: Monsters vs. Humans</b>	Metro3D	October	No
<b>ShellShock: Nam '67</b>	Eidos	TBA	No
<b>Shrek 2</b>	Activision	Summer	No
<b>Silent Hill 4</b>	Konami	Fall	No
<b>Sitting Ducks</b>	Hip Games	Spring	No
<b>SNK vs. Capcom: SVC Chaos</b>	SNK	November	Yes
<b>Spider-Man 2</b>	Activision	June	No
<b>Star Wars Battlefront</b>	LucasArts	Fall	Yes
<b>Star Wars Republic Commando</b>	LucasArts	Fall	Yes
<b>StarCraft: Ghost</b>	Blizzard	Summer	No
<b>State of Emergency 2</b>	Bam	Winter	TBA
<b>Street Racing Syndicate</b>	Namco	Fall	No
<b>Sudeki</b>	Microsoft	Summer	No
<b>Terminator 3</b>	Atari	Summer	No
<b>The Chronicles of Riddick</b>	Vivendi	June	Yes
<b>The Fast and the Furious</b>	Vivendi	Winter	No
<b>The Mummy</b>	Hip Games	May	No
<b>The Punisher</b>	THQ	Fall	No
<b>The Red Star</b>	Acclaim	October	No
<b>The Suffering</b>	Midway	April	No
<b>Thief: Deadly Shadows</b>	Eidos	May	No
<b>TimeSplitters 3</b>	EA	TBA	TBA
<b>ToCA Race Driver 2</b>	Codemasters	May	Yes
<b>Trivial Pursuit</b>	Atari	April	Yes
<b>Tron 2.0: Killer App</b>	Buena Vista Games	TBA	Yes
<b>True Fantasy Live Online</b>	Microsoft	Winter	Yes
<b>Van Helsing</b>	Vivendi	May	No
<b>Worms 3D</b>	Acclaim	May	Yes
<b>X-Men Legends</b>	Activision	May	No

# XCRATED

SMART REVIEWS MAY 2004

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## REVIEWATRON

Because a bird in the hand is worth poop in the palm, oh yes...

◆ The Hitman has been terminated. It was Xbox Nation's intention to write the world-exclusive review for Eidos' *Hitman: Contracts*, but reality, sadly, got in the way. The game was simply not finished at press time, but *XBN* promises an in-depth review of *Hitman* in next month's issue.

As for the rest, well, expect mirth and mayhem in equal measure. Midway's *The Suffering* offers up a poisoned prison, a convict who can

turn himself into a monster, and the feel-good line of the year.

Comic book antihero Judge Dredd and Cartoon Network star Samurai Jack make their first appearances on Xbox, Pitfall Harry returns to console glory, and the giant mechs from *Steel Battalion* shake off the rust for another go—this time with the online-only adventure *Line of Contact*.

Finally, there is much jubilation in this particular Xbox nation. This issue finally sees the review for

Tecmo's skull-cleaving epic *Ninja Gaiden*. Was it worth the wait?

As a parting shot, bad developers are urged to heed the following warning: Beware. You may run, but you will not hide from the blinding light of truth. If your game stinks worse than the toilets at Grand Central Station, you will be reading about it in *XBN*'s "File Under: L" loser column. Nor will any quarter be given, or mercy issued, for the man, woman, or savvy robot designated as this month's Xbozo.

## MAY XCRATED AWARDS ↴

### Game of the Month



Ninja Gaiden  
Tecmo

The international brotherhood of ninja, meeting fortnightly in some secret lair in some unknown part of the world, has smiled down on video assassin Ryu Hayabusa.

### F.U.B.A.R. Award



Steel Battalion: Line of Contact  
(Capcom)

Buggy, lag-laden, and single-mindedly frustrating, Capcom's *Steel Battalion: Line of Contact* takes the fight online in a most janktacular way. For shame.

### Best Western



Dead Man's Hand  
Atari

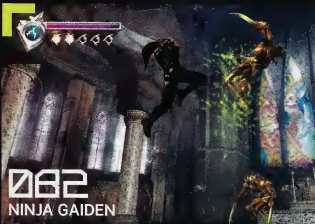
For being the only, and thus the best, Old West-themed shooter on Xbox, the much-coveted Best Western award goes to Atari's *Dead Man's Hand*.

### Worst-Person Mode



Tie: All-Star Baseball 2005/  
ESPN Major League Baseball

First is worst, at least in terms of perspectives in baseball games. *All-Star Baseball 2005* and *ESPN Major League Baseball* both have first-person modes to their discredit.



**062**  
NINJA GAIDEN



**096**  
DEAD MAN'S HAND



**091**  
SAMURAI JACK: THE  
SHADOW OF AKU



**068**  
THE SUFFERING

**078**  
ALIAS



## LAST MONTH'S HIT OR MISS ↘



**HIT**  
MVP Baseball 2004  
Electronic Arts

Electronic Arts went all-out for its latest baseball offering, giving players access to a host of minor league teams, old-school uniforms, and classic players. Bravo!



**MISS**  
IHRA Drag Racing 2004  
Bethesda Softworks

Grueling and near-bottomless, *IHRA Drag Racing 2004* prompted this criticism: "This game is not so much a drag racing simulation as it is a simulation that's a drag."

## MAKING THE GRADE

The score's the thing...

↘ Celebrate greatness: Flush video focus. This is the mandate Xbox Nation game reviewers are given and the philosophy its critics operate under. XBN strives to be harsh but fair in its scoring, with games costing upwards of \$50, no one benefits from reviews with padded scores and, as mom always told us, honesty is the best policy.

Breaking down review grades, you'll find a game with a score of one is Satan's bedchild. Two indicates raw sewage. Three is embarrassing, four is flawed. Five

equals average. Six is all it is. Seven is good, eight great. Nine is excellent, and 10 out of 10 is near-perfection.

### XBOX LIVE

↘ Look for this handy-dandy box describing a game's Xbox Live content. As always, Xbox Live content will be factored in to achieve a holistic final grade.



# ALIAS

PUBLISHER: Acclaim // DEVELOPER: Acclaim Cheltenham // PLAYERS: 1 // LIVE: No // MSRP: \$49.99 // ESRB: T

## Suddenly Sydney doesn't seem so hot

➔ The damning stigma once attached to movie-licensed games has finally begun to fade. Enter *The Matrix*

notwithstanding, the *dour days* of *Hudson Hawk* and *Total Recall* are no more—top-quality hits such as *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* and *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* prove filmic thrills can translate into good gameplay. Sadly, the same turnaround has yet to bless games based on cinema's tacky younger brother, television. Even the most ardent fans would be hard-pressed to suffer through a TV-based title: *X-Files* and *Star Trek* aficionados could tell you countless stories of

loss and disappointment. Not deterred by this legacy of failure, Acclaim bravely presents its foray into boob-tube gaming, *Alias*.

*Alias* centers on the wildly complex adventures of Sydney Bristow, a stunning superspy bent on unraveling a colossal conspiracy to utilize ancient technology for world domination. Oh, and her father is her boss, her partner is her boyfriend, her roommate was an evil clone, and she was brainwashed for two years. Actually, that's one of the game's first stumbling blocks: If you're not already an avid fan of the guilty-pleasure TV drama, you'll be baffled here. Honestly, the narrative will fail to inspire nonfans, as it is largely a watered-down rehash of last season's events devoid of context.

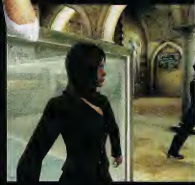
So, assuming you are already an *Alias* fan, is this worth your time (and money)? Well, the trappings are certainly nice—Bristow's in-game avatar shimmies and shimmers in all the right places, the massive environments teem with detail, and many levels do seem like plausible

bits from the show. It helps that Acclaim snagged nearly the entire cast from the show to do voicework, as well as its composer. If anything, this game sounds precisely like *Alias*.

Looking and sounding like the show isn't really enough, though. *Alias* also needs to offer thrilling gameplay...and, well, it doesn't. Each level follows a similar premise: Bristow wears a disguise to infiltrate some foreign locale, performs various bits of reconnaissance using clever op-tech doo-dicks, and stealthily avoids combat. The skimpy disguises work fine, but missions fall apart when it comes time to do some spying. Poorly cued, confusing objectives pepper the levels. For example, you'll be told to "destroy the security system" or "locate the morgue" without being



Sydney's stealth suit functioned perfectly, except around the midriff.





In the words of a *Dead or Alive* ad: She kicks high.

## RESULTS MAY VARY

You might have expected cut-scenes to unfold using real video, but *Alias* instead offers CG-rendered cinemas, of wildly varying quality. Briefings between missions look swank, but ones that pop up during levels look noticeably less polished. Bizarre.



## MINIGAME BONANZA

Many of Sydney's op-tech gizmos work via minigames. For example, successfully using the lock pick requires some gentle massaging of the analog stick to fit pins in holes, and hacking into computers via the remote modem has you guessing a three-letter password.

told what the security system looks like or where the morgue is. An unreliable map system and a vaguely *Crazy Taxi*-esque guidance arrow are supposed to assist with these design snafus, but don't expect them to always work.

While obtuse level design hampers *Alias*, an utterly busted fighting engine nearly destroys it. Simply put, both hand-to-hand and weapons combat are wretched: Bristow's kung fu is a mashy, misguided guessing game, and ammo-deprived guns offer little help. And since stealth rarely works (since you have no indication of whether or not guards can see you), you'll be clumsily kicking and punching a lot.

In the end, *Alias* deserves credit for capturing the show's audiovisual vibe—diehard fans will be able to derive some pleasure from it. As a game, however, its quality ranks between *VP* for PlayStation and *ALF* for Sega Master System, which is to say, it's not that great. //

Shane Bettenhausen

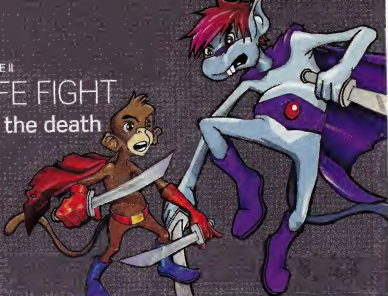
SUPER MONKEY KNIFE FIGHT // BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II

## SUPER MONKEY KNIFE FIGHT

Each month, two games duel to the death

And to think your high school guidance counselor said high-seas pirating was a dead-end job—the scurvy bastard. So now you're stuck swabbing the deck in aisle five instead of decking swabs in taverns, pillaging villages, and letting your teeth rot while singing salty sea shanties. But fret not, me Xbox-owning hearties, because if a pirate's life

really is for thee, you'll find a game duo—*Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Pirates: Legend of the Black Kat*—that plunges players leagues deep into repalcation escapism. Which is worth the doubloons? Find out in this first edition of "Super Monkey Knife Fight"—sort of a grudge match thingle with the surreality cranked to 11. **Crispin Boyer**



	Skeleton-monkey quotient:	Swordplay style:	Who's the main man?	Accu-weather forecast:	Ship-on-ship action:	If this game were a Disney Ride, it'd be...	Overall seaworthiness:	The winner:
<i>Pirates: Legend of the Black Kat</i>	Koko the gorilla	Quick LessShine	Not Johnny Depp	Wrecked at Benne's	Not	The Trumpet beats	Good Ship Lollipop	Truly, when super monkey knife fight, can these ever be a winner?
<i>Pirates of the Caribbean</i>	King Kong	Outlass Supreme	Also not Johnny Depp	The Perfect Storm	Kat and wet	Uh, what occasion fight?	The Titanic	Of course there can't be a winner. In this case, Caribban blasts Black Kat's boat to splinters with six full-on broadsides. The first score?
<b>The Winner</b>	<i>Pirates of the Caribbean</i> —You'll swab more skeleton monkeys before 10 a.m. than you find in Black Kat all dang day.	A visit... of the Caribbean—Both games' sword duels involve hacking and possibly slugging, but the latter, although you'll actually need to parry once in a while in Caribbean.	Do you... of the Black Kat—But then, this game isn't based on a Johnny Depp flick. Duh.	<i>Pirates of the Caribbean</i> —Your ship gets a swabbery tresser in Caribbeankin. However, to scumme shreds down the bettered Or something.	<i>Pirates of the Caribbean</i> —High seas combat in Black Kat is a sluttier of press than, say, Caribbean puts you right behind the cannons.	<i>Pirates of the Caribbean</i> —Black Kat's linear adventure is simple enough for a wile, at 1,000 feet tall.	<i>Pirates of the Caribbean</i> — <i>Pirates</i> packs a lot more people to see and places to plunder. Too bad it's rickety with glitches. This beat looks.	<i>Pirates of the Caribbean</i> — <i>Pirates</i> packs a lot more people to see and places to plunder. Too bad it's rickety with glitches. This beat looks.

## BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II

PUBLISHER: Black Isle Studios // DEVELOPER: Interplay // PLAYERS: 1-2 // LIVE/NO // MSRP: \$49.99 // ESRB: T

Close the gate behind you, will ya?

Black Isle Studios' follow-up to *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* proves the oft-spoken rule of sequels: They're never as good as the original. Considering the troubles Black Isle faced last December, it can be said game fans are lucky to get a sequel at all. Luck like this, however, they

need like a bleeding ulcer. *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II* looks like an action-RPG but feels more like a *Dungeons & Dragons*-based beat-em-up with the obligatory NPC conversations thrown in to give players an excuse to bash the stuffing out of the next horde of unsightly creatures. The

game's best feature is its cooperative play, but, inexplicably, it's limited to two players. Utilizing stiff controls to attack dungeons upon dungeons of creatures, either solo or with a friend, is a tired gameplay model from generations ago. Wizard needs food—and a new idea—badly.

The graphics are passable, but they're only slightly better than the game's predecessor's, and there seems to be some sort of a motion-blur effect surrounding several of the dungeons, making your vision go out of focus. Top it all off with slightly nominal sound effects and music that inexplicably stops at random intervals, and what you get is an omelette of a game whose eggs are a bit too runny. // **Russell Garbutt**



**XBN 04**  
OUT OF TEN



# XRATED

JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS. DEATH

# JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS. DEATH

PUBLISHER: Evolved Games // DEVELOPER: Rebellion // PLAYERS: 1-4 // GENRE: No // MSRP: \$39.99 // ESRB: M

## Due process takes a gutshot

▶ The fatigued and futuristic world of Judge Dredd is one well suited to solo bravado, wanton violence, and impossible odds—not unlike the settings of most first-person shooters. But even the best licenses can be both a blessing and a curse. *Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death* delivers competent, by-the-books gunplay infused with the titular character, but it fails to astound in either respect.

It's all here: rag-doll physics, exploding barrels, lots of guns (Dredd's primary sidearm—the Lawgiver—sports six different firing modes), and hit-or-miss one-liners. Sadly, *Death* also features

clichéd missions, confusing objectives (occasionally confounded by dubious A.I.), and tedious, repetitive environments. Set in the anarchistic Mega City One, the game features more NPCs than most games in the genre, from goggled graffiti artists to human whales on wheels. The addition of a Law meter prevents the player from simply arresting (Judges have considerable artistic license when it comes to trouncing up charges) or shooting them all—it's clever in its conception, but in practice, it's mostly just a pain in the ass.

And with just 11 (mostly mindless) missions, *Death* is a

short-lived affair—cooperative play just shortens the experience even more. Unlockable arcade modes add to the longevity, but they're all variants on the “spot and shoot a lot of enemies” theme—only the ultracompetitive will find more than a few rounds of pleasure here.

*Death* has its moments of intensity and black humor (the *Day of the Dead*-style mall level is well wrought), but it simply doesn't live up to its namesake. Cop or not, Dredd's a counterculture icon: Action aside, *Judge Dredd* the comic book remains popular because it skewers contemporary culture. *Judge Dredd* the game gets the gunplay and gruff attitude right, but beneath the badge, it's simply, well, not unlike most first-person shooters. //

David Chen

**XBON 06**  
OUT OF TEN

ProTip: It helps if you scream, “I am the law!” at random intervals.



# XRATED

NINJA GAIDEN

# NINJA GAIDEN

PUBLISHER: Tecmo // DEVELOPER: Tecmo // PLAYERS: 1 // LIVE: Yes // MSRP: \$49.99 // ESRB: M

Is that a katana or Ryu glad to see me?

Hard as nails and to the core, to boot, *Ninja Gaiden* arrives not a moment too soon. Standing tall against the tide of interactive mediocrity, Tecmo's latest outshines a whole lot of games on a whole lot of levels. And in spite of its gee-whiz artistry, attitude, and technical grandeur,

## SHE'S A BEAUTY

Not surprisingly, *Gaiden* looks and frequently feels like a *Dead or Alive* game gone action; it comes, after all, courtesy of Tomonobu Itagaki's Team Ninja. From skull-cleaving and death-defying acrobatics to heaving, gravity-defying bosoms, everything appears onscreen at the same razor-

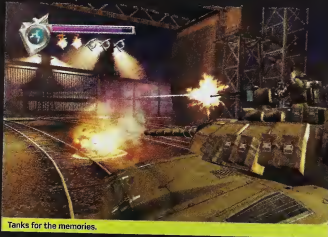
sharp resolution. Exacting attention is lavished on the animation set of vengeful hero Ryu Hayabusa, even when he's at rest; when he stands on a shallow incline, one knee is bent properly. Such seemingly superfluous details as fallen leaves dotting a quiet village path are similarly lovingly rendered. *Gaiden*'s hodgepodge mixture of background motifs gets the same treatment. From elegant airships and labyrinthine sewers to icy grottos and fields of lava, *Gaiden*'s slick sense of archetypal arcade ambience never falters; even the requisite underwater level isn't as tedious as one might expect. Set pieces, like a *Raiders of the Lost Ark*-style boulder dash, keep players on their toes and their skills sharp. There is, naturally, a fair amount of backtracking, but it's nothing as laborious as the latter acts of *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Walker*. As with Nintendo's epic, new areas are revealed due to in-game events, but *Gaiden*'s world is set to a much more manageable scale and is more intricately, impressively intertwined.

## CUTTING TO THE CHASE

Combat, which comprises most of *Gaiden*'s guts and glory, is every bit as deeply satisfying as it is satisfyingly deep. Exploring the weapon-selection menu reveals

GAIDEN IS AS CLASSIC—  
AND UNPRETENTIOUS—AS  
THEY COME

it's as classic—and unpretentious—as they come. To all those who cut their teeth on the good ol' games and find themselves grousing fondly for a time when each jump necessitated flawless timing, 36-digit passcodes were as prized as air, and boss fights were bruisers—real white-knuckle affairs—your hardcore savior has finally arrived.



Tanks for the memories.



## XBOX LIVE

Ninja *Gaiden*'s mounted online mode isn't quite revolutionary, but it's certainly intriguing. Aspiring asskickers can register for a global tournament kicking off at E3, competing for the top ranking in a set of trial missions available only through Xbox Live. So, sharpen your skills—and your swords—the World Master Ninja Finals take place at X04 this September.



## HERE'S BLOOD IN YOUR EYE

### Tools of the tortuous trade

Along the snaking road to revenge, Ryu Hayabusa acquires a host of handy tools with which to lay waste to his foes. A blue-blooded ninja hero, and bred, he's just as handy with his trusty Dragon Sword as he is with nunchaku, a spear gun, or a massive war hammer, which is ideal for clearing out rooms or—sometimes—accessing new ones. Long-range weaponry includes shuriken (in both

standard and sizzling, incendiary flavors) and a Strong Bow, which can be equipped with standard, armor-piercing, or explosive arrows. Ninja magic—or ninpo—is as handy as it is handsomely rendered, with icy, flammable, and electrical variants wreaking considerable havoc. To the delight of death dealers everywhere, weapons can be enhanced, courtesy of the Vigoror Empire's local merchants.







## SOUNDING OFF

Laughable localization aside, *Ninja Gaiden* sounds every bit as good as it looks: From steel slicing through air to a beheaded foe falling to the ground, all the game's effects are resoundingly gratifying. The soundtrack, which shuttles from the sweeping and somber to rockin' guitar riffs, is suitably suitably dramatic.



*Ninja Gaiden*, unlike many military helicopters, never crashes.

rows of elaborately monickered, intricately illustrated fighting techniques there for the learning. As with most 3D fighters, however, learning all of them is far from necessary; with a few key maneuvers—and judicious use of the block/evade trigger—players can progress with relative confidence.

But those same fighting-game roots also lead to *Gaiden*'s most controversial feature: its camera system, about which complaints have been and will continue to be registered. Set at the compulsory cine-dynamic angles, it's easily centered with a click of the right



trigger—although this, admittedly, can get to be tiring at times. More troubling instances occur during heated battles against multiple opponents, of which there are many.



The game's auto-locking mechanic has been fine-tuned so as to feel absolutely intuitive, but as a result, players will oftentimes find themselves stylishly kicking some serious—but offscreen—ass. The camera can't be adjusted in midmaneuver (or midair), which may leave some players frustrated, unsettled, or both.

**STUCK ON YOU**  
With so much information unfolding smoothly onscreen, the close-up camera is crucial to keeping the player in the action. Unlike other successful updates of tried-and-true genres (EA's brace of *Lord of the Rings*-based beat-'em-ups, for example), button mashing simply won't cut it—not with enemies this robust and such an awesome array of abilities on hand. A less-caressing camera may have been more effective, but it wouldn't have looked so damn cool, which is *Gaiden*'s unabashedly primary principle. Games such as Capcom's *Viewtiful Joe* and *Devil May Cry* have followed this same macho mantra to

considerable effect, but when it comes to that fresh, cool feeling, *Gaiden* is tough to beat.

## SO GOOD IT HURTS

By any measure, there's no shortage of quality videogame here to be savored, and at 16 taxing "levels" in length, *Gaiden* more than justifies its sticker price in both satisfaction and man-hours. It completely captures the core of that oft-revered 2D console gameplay and re-realizes it almost flawlessly. It's appropriate then that it's up there with the most grueling and least forgiving of games. But it's rarely unfair: Success is quite simply every bit as reliant on concentration, discipline, and patience as it is on dexterity and timing. It is, as the kids are fond of saying, old school. If *Gaiden* isn't the "perfect" action game, it's pretty damn close. //

**David Chen**



## YOU'RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME

From lowly bats and underwater lobstrosities to an array of well-armed, quick-on-the-toes ninja, militia, and fire-faced demons, there's never a shortage of enemies to be slaughtered. Even more exciting is the motley crew of impressively lavish minibosses, sub-bosses, and big bosses populating each level, occasionally in succession, ensuring there's never a shortage of challengers.

**XBN 09**  
OUT OF TEN

# XTENDED FAMILY

Free (of cords) at last

## HIP XBOX WIRELESS CONTROLLER

HIP GEAR \$39.99

**The Good:** Cheap, lightweight.  
**The Bad:** Oddly shaped receiver, oversensitive triggers

↳ Hip Gear throws its hat or, in this case, its ugly-looking green-and-black wireless controller into the Xbox peripheral ring and remarkably carves a nice little place. Although its squarish receiver—when connected, it juts out past the bottom of the Xbox—and loose triggers win it no points, the peripheral redeems itself twice over: It's extremely lightweight, despite holding four AA batteries, and functions perfectly well from distances of up to 20 or so feet.

Extra touches, such as rubberized grips, a turbo button, and a power switch to conserve battery life, elevate the Hip Wireless Controller to a contender for the throne. As with the other members of its wireless ilk, the Hip Wireless features a port for a memory card only on its receiver, so—let the buyer beware—players will still be tied to a cord if they opt to play on Xbox Live. //



## WIRELESS NET EXTENDER

NYKO \$99.99



**The Good:** It's a snap to set up; very reliable

**The Bad:** Two large AC adapters at both ends, not any cheaper than a regular wireless setup

↳ When ex-President Clinton talked about a "wired nation," he did not mean Americans must endure a future of tangled cords. Many have solutions for this national crisis, but Nyko has among the simplest. The Net Extender behaves like a "virtual Ethernet cable"—you attach the base unit to your net connection and the remote unit to your Xbox, and for all intents and purposes, there's an invisible network wire connecting the two ends together. If you've got a live net link coming from somewhere, you can set the whole thing up in minutes. Take a quick browse through your computer store's networking section, though, and you may wonder if the Extender is worth \$100. Sure, the \$99.99 gets you everything you need in one box, but you can buy a "real" wireless router for all of your PCs and consoles for considerably less. //



## THEY MADE THIS?!

No, really, someone made this...

## Mushaburui Cockpit Simulator

Masaya LLC \$349.99

↳ It's a well-known fact that fans of Capcom's massive mech simulator *Steel Battalion* love nothing more than to pour cash into this pit: they proudly proclaim as their hobby and lifestyle. The evidence is indisputable thus far—they're willing to plunk down 200 bucks for the game and controller, 50 ducats for *Line of Contact*, an online-only add-on pack, and another 50 smackaroos for their Xbox Live subscription for a total of 500 bar ones (including \$200 for the Xbox) just to piss off their significant others. Masaya LLC of Yokohama, Japan, is well aware of this fact and eager to satisfy the spending urges of *Battalion* players everywhere. The Mushaburui Cockpit Simulator not only serves as a frame for your *Battalion* dashboard, it also doubles as an orange bucket sled for those cold winter days. //

## STEEL BATTALION: LINE OF CONTACT

PUBLISHER: Capcom // DEVELOPER: Capcom // PLAYERS: 2-10 // LIVE: Yes // MSRP: \$49.99 // ESRB: T

The thick, near-impenetrable fog of war

For an overwhelming majority of Xbox owners, *Steel Battalion* remains an elusive \$200 curiosity. Shipped complete with its own massive dashboard and heavy-duty foot pedals, Capcom's ambitious giant-robot simulator scored 10 out of 10 from *Xbox Nation* for its uncompromising vision of mechanized warfare. But the original game did have its shortcomings. *Battalion's* core gameplay is more compelling than the dull, A.I.-inhabited world in which it functions, making its Live-enabled sequel, *Line of Contact*, the perfect foil and successor. Unfortunately, similar to the company's previous Xbox Live efforts, *Contact* shows Capcom is still obstinately shortsighted when it comes to online gaming.

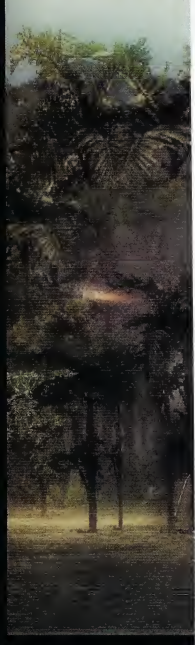
At the time of the original's release, it was easy to overlook *Battalion's* Xbox Live omission: Live was still in its infancy in late 2002, and the game, with its hulking 40-button controller, featured more

than enough innovation to quell any online-game lust. But for Capcom to release an online-only addendum to a \$200 game a year and a half later is pushing its luck...and your compassion. Take heed: *Contact* lacks any sort of single-player experience—no offline tutorial, no screaming boot camp sarge you'd love to hate, and no random-mission generator for returning vertical tank pilots dusting off their hibernating controllers. While this isn't technically a problem for a game advertised as "online only," it is nonetheless disappointing.

Months before *Contact's* retail debut, Capcom staged an international beta test for a lucky handful of Xbox Live subscribers in the United States, Japan, and Europe. *XBN* was on hand to experience the beta test, and tragically, much of what plagued the prerelease *Contact*—namely, extreme network lag, buggy gameplay, and insurmountable connection issues—still exists in the final release. As of press time,

playing *Contact* on Xbox Live requires an extreme amount of patience and dedication—perhaps these are virtues Capcom imagines it'd likely find in *Battalion's* built-in hardcore audience.

Forget about all those easygoing, lag-free times you've had on Xbox Live in the past six months. If you're looking for a quick game of shoot-the-robot-in-the-face with *Contact*—better think again. The fact that it actually takes longer to find and connect to a game than it does to play one speaks volumes about *Contact's* online impotence. A week after the game hit shelves, entire days went by in which *Contact's* meat-and-potatoes campaign game was completely unplayable, leaving desperate players fending for themselves in the much less gratifying free-battle mode (which really serves as a practice arena for the campaign showdown). Even worse is the fact that the game will ruthlessly excise your hard-earned collection of mechs if you're dropped from a campaign battle (which



Later generation VTs feature ultrapowerful railguns and transparent cockpit domes.





## BATTLE LIONS UNITE!

Having problems getting online with *Steel Battalion: Line of Contact*? Need some advice on what's the best loadout for your Scareface? Or maybe you're just looking for other like-minded *Battalion* freaks? Bypass the useless official Capcom forums and head straight to Steel Battalion Central (<http://sbc.pipin.us/>) for all your community needs. It's a fairly sure bet you didn't know there were so many *Battalion* nerds out there.

# XRATED

STEEL BATTALION: LINE OF CONTACT



Welcome to the jungle—the jungle of lag and disappointment.



### Heavy Metal Online

Beyond the expected cosmetic customization of vertical tanks, *Steel Battalion: Line of Contact*'s campaign mode simulates a persistent war between two or more nations. Each conflict is divided into eight turns that last for two real-time days each. Each campaign battle fought (and won) is tallied up at the end of each turn, at which time the shift in the balance of power is reflected on a global map.

(happens with alarming frequency).

Rounding off an already frustrating online package for *Contact* are two additional head scratchers: First of all, the game ships with an instruction manual so poorly translated that mechs (aka vertical tanks) are referred to half the time as aircraft. For a complex simulator requiring a 40-button controller, you'd expect something more than a slipshod black-and-white brochure. Secondly, Capcom demonstrates, once again, its inability to create decent user interfaces for its online games. *Contact* lacks the little touches that allow for a smooth online experience. Postcombat, for instance, there isn't actually a way to stay in a lobby—and continue playing—with the people from your last game; instead, all parties have to log out and start from scratch.

The most infuriating part of this debacle is that there's actually a very good game buried beneath all

the technical issues. When the stars are aligned and if the gods are willing, you may have a decent go with players who are willing to use teamwork and strategy to win the round. When that happens, you'll see that the experience is unlike any available today on consoles. A ton of new vertical tanks (including a support mech that eavesdrops on enemy communications) and some useful new weapons (such as a sniper rifle to pick off foes at extreme distances) make *Contact* a most excellent add-on for *Battalion* gearheads. But as it stands, *Contact* is buggy and unfinished—a shameful, full-priced add-on pack tarnishing the original *Battalion*'s golden legacy. //

**Che Chou**

# XBN 04

OUT OF TEN



It's going to take a lot of protein to eliminate these protein stains.

## THE SUFFERING

PUBLISHER: Midway // DEVELOPER: Surreal Software // PLAYERS: 1 // LIVE: No // MSRP: \$49.99 // ESRB: M

### Hard time in a haunted slammer

Midway's recent plunge into the world of mature gaming comes in the rather disfigured form of *The Suffering*. It's an action-horror romp, with equal parts gunplay, bloodletting, cursing, and deviant behavior, perhaps explaining the dismissal of

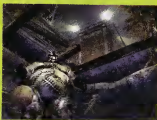
working title *The Snuggling*.

Players step into the shoes of hard-edged psychopath Torque, who has been imprisoned for a murder he may or may not have committed. A demonic outbreak takes place inside the prison and a game is born.

*Suffering* succeeds largely by

virtue of its decidedly grim atmosphere and solid mechanics. Throughout the journey, one is confronted by a series of situations wherein Torque's forced to choose between right and wrong: waste valuable time and health helping save a feeble, annoying, self-serving but ultimately pitiable security guard or pop a cathartic shotgun shell through his face and get on with it? Torque's fate rests in the players' hands—their actions govern the future by way of the past and determine whether the antihero did, in fact, butcher his wife and kids.

Perhaps in spite of the developer's best intentions, *Suffering* falls on the more corporeal side of the horror genre, with psychological tension taking a back seat to lots of monster bashing. Torque occasionally dips into well-presented flashbacks, bringing to light pieces of the intentionally vague story line through apparitions of his family, Nazi doctors, and



corrupt wardens. It's above-average stuff, certainly, but spotty writing and voice acting pothole the story. Still, despite its flaws, *Suffering* remains an enjoyable and surprisingly compelling blastathon.

And who could overlook *Suffering*'s feel-good line of the year? "Will you shut the @!#! up, you baby-raping, sodomizing sack of sh#!!" //

Evann Shamoon

Game enemies are themed after the way they were killed.



# TENCHU: RETURN FROM DARKNESS

PUBLISHER: Activision // DEVELOPER: K2 // PLAYERS: 1-2 // LIVE: Yes // MSRP: \$49.99 // ESRB: M

## Out of the blue and into the black

**Tenchu: Return From Darkness** has several strikes against it. It's behind the technology curve. It's not an original game, although it adds new levels and features to the PlayStation 2's *Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven*. It enters a genre that's grown by leaps and bounds since the original *Tenchu* started it all, having grown by neither a leap nor a bound in the same time. Its camera is frequently homicidal (with no radar to make up for the lack of peripheral vision), its level design is muddled, and its A.I. frequently tells the bad guys it's fine to step off a ledge that's higher than they are tall.

And yet, there's still something about it. What made the original fun six years ago is still fun in *Darkness*. Its visual style is consistently sharp despite the underpowered engine. The simplicity of the levels and A.I. is an advantage of sorts, too, offering a looser feel and wider variety of options than the heavily scripted *Metal Gear Solid* and *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell*. And there's a hell of a lot of content, with the three available characters having distinct missions with several enemy layouts.

Multiplayer isn't much of a draw in itself. Co-op may be better than deathmatch, but both pale before *Shadow Strike*, the online game in *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow*. The total package, though, is still unique, even if it's not all it could have been. //

Dave Smith



**XBN 06**  
OUT OF TEN



Ancient Chinese torsional techniques were oftentimes fatal.

# NBA BALLERS

PUBLISHER: Midway // DEVELOPER: Midway // PLAYERS: 1-2 // LIVE: No // MSRP: \$39.99 // ESRB: E

## Hoop dreams do come true

Setting basketball games in alternative environments isn't necessarily a new concept. But any formula is a fun formula when it's done right. *NBA Ballers* is an amazing sports game that plays like a song and has all the makings of a classic hit. It comes as no surprise that Midway, the very same team that introduced the world to the gem known as *NBA Jam*, built *Ballers*.

*Ballers* takes top contemporary and legendary basketball players

from the NBA and puts them in 1-on-1 matchups. These games happen outside of professional arenas; you can play anywhere from Scottie Pippen's yacht to Stephen Marbury's backyard. There are special challenges for unlocking prized players and elaborate customization options to make your own players. The details in the faces, bodies, and in-game animations are stunning.

In rags to riches mode, you create your own baller and take

him to tournaments across the country. Starting off in the famous street playground Rucker Park, you ball your way through the ranks, facing fictional street hoopers touting a wide array of skill sets. Some are menacingly tall and will dunk on you relentlessly. Others have handles and love watching you break your ankles on their darting juke moves.

The only hole—if just a pinprick—here is the lack of player-to-player trash talking. Instead, the commentator makes all the snide remarks. Outside of that, *Ballers* is a star among basketball games and a must-have for any basketball fan on the planet. //

Jason Allen



My mansion, my miracle dunk.



**XBN 09**  
OUT OF TEN



## FIGHT NIGHT 2004

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts // DEVELOPER: Electronic Arts // PLAYERS: 2-2 // DATE: Nov. 11 // MSRP: \$49.99 // ESRB: T

## Or: Super Punch-Out

Electronic Arts has been prompting a landmark boxing title for quite some time. Ever since motion capture became a staple for EA Sports, the publisher's *Knockout Kings* series has stood as one of the primary showpieces for the technique. Glossy, detailed renders of sweaty pugilists graced those games, alluding to the progress the genre had made. This was 3D. This was the next step.

And yet with exciting new technology, so too came exciting new technological obstacles. While the *Kings* titles certainly moved more convincingly, the gameplay remained that of the button-mashing variety—only less fulfilling than it had been minus one

dimension, due to the disconnect between each particular mash and its accompanying mo-capped animation. As was the case in nearly every other genre—most relevantly the storied 1-on-1 fighting game as it transitioned from *Street Fighter II* to *Soul Calibur*—coming to grips with this 3D business was going to take some time.

That time appears to have arrived, as *Fight Night 2004* represents a bold step forward for an all-but-stagnant genre. Perhaps due to the phenomenal financial success the company has experienced in recent years, EA has boldly replaced the button-mashing legacy of boxing games past with a dynamic system in which the second analog stick on the Xbox controller is used to manage all punching. The motions are logical: up on the stick throws a jab, an upward half-circle motion throws an uppercut, and so on. The right side is the right hand; the left side is the left hand. While not an exact representation of what it's like to actually ram one's fist into a man's face and/or stomach, it's a significantly more organic

representation of the real thing than simply pushing the A button.

The game holds the fills one expects from an EA game these days: dozens of real boxers; a full career mode, complete with training minigames and the ability to strengthen one's character in a series of categories; and a create-a-boxer mode. But what makes the game so compelling is the subtle, refined dexterity involved in throwing a flurry of jabs, dodging your opponent's vicious right hook, landing a smooth one-two combo to his jaw, and then getting your guard back up in time to successfully block his counterattack. It's dense and intimidating, and it demands practice; give it time, and button-mashing will no longer seem relevant in boxing games.

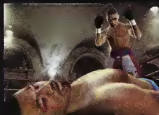
And after 30 years spent punching things in videogames, it's about time. //

Evan Shamoon

**XBN 08**  
OUT OF TEN

## A LESSON IN PAIN

It should be noted that *Fight Night 2004* is perhaps the most brutal game ever, due to its combination of detailed character models, frighteningly persuasive motion capture, and deftly managed collision detection. Punches land with visible force; heads snap back violently; blood geyzers from broken noses, and boxers crumble to the canvas with wince-inducing physics. It's all a bit much, but it conveys the point very effectively. (That point being, of course, that boxing hurts a lot.)



The impromptu lobotomy was a smashing success.



## SAMURAI JACK: THE SHADOW OF AKU

PUBLISHER: Sega of America // DEVELOPER: Amuse // PLAYERS: 1 // LIVE: No // MSRP: \$39.99 // ESRB: T

## You don't know, Jack

Samurai Jack, the Cartoon Network animated series, rocks. *Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku*, the not-so-animated game, stands as merely passable. In his first videogame outing, the sword-slinging, shuriken-tossing Jack destroys robots aplenty, rescues villagers, and collects little green artifacts—to be sure, the fun things in life.

Graphics here are grainy at best. With the advancement of animation over the last five years, *Aku* should be an almost-perfect reproduction of the show. Oddly, however, *Aku* for Xbox has a cheery sort of brightness not reflected by the cartoon that inspired it. Yet in contrast, close-ups of Jack and other characters during the various vignettes show off a muddy aesthetic.

All-too-sensitive controls and odd views sparked by a flaky camera detract from the experience. Moving Jack along a catwalk without the camera placed directly behind him means frustration when the samurai falls off and lives, or doom when the fall is fatal, and then it's back to where the game was last saved. This is a bad thing, especially for a game emphasizing platform hopping and fighting.

Still, a person could easily waste several hours traveling Jack's oversized stomping grounds. It's just genuinely unfortunate that the cartoon consistently scores touchdowns whereas the game fumbles like a man with melted butter on his fingers. //

Scott Asnault



**XBN 05**  
OUT OF TEN



The bamboo vest is a fashion faux pas.



■ Samurai Jack says, "Sushi Give me sushi, and nothing but sushi."

## PITFALL: THE LOST EXPEDITION

PUBLISHER: Activision // DEVELOPER: Edge of Reality // PLAYERS: 1 // LIVE: No // MSRP: \$39.99 // ESRB: E

## Paradise Lost

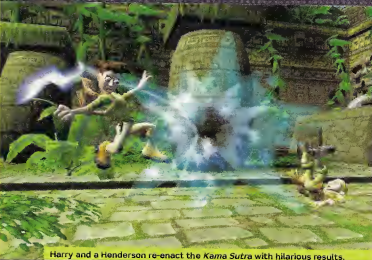
↳ If it wasn't for some blue-collar lout named Mario, Pitfall Harry would be the biggest action hero in videogames. Back in the day, Harry ran, Harry jumped, Harry swung on vines that tilted back and forth by themselves, and that was all Activision needed to

sell 3 million copies of the first *Pitfall* in 1982. Twenty-two years later, Harry's over the drinking age, but despite adding a third dimension to his repertoire, the dude is mired in the 20th century. *Pitfall: The Lost Expedition* cannot be accused of originality.

You could try, but it wouldn't hold up in any court of law. You'll run into all the usual platform-game sidekicks (the demented rival explorer, the disinterested love interest, the live-talkin' jaguar), all the usual moves (why hello there, Mr. Double Jump), and all the usual hopping and item grabbing. The only real jolt of innovation is the game's incessant use of the right analog stick, which corresponds directly to the hero's right hand—to drink from a canteen, you bring it to your mouth by pressing up on the stick, and so forth. Very cute.

It's a lucky thing this system provides some novelty, because *Expedition* is otherwise unremarkable. The game's well polished, yes, and it would have been hailed as revolutionary a few years ago. Now, though, it's just another descent, 10-hour-long hop-n-bop to add to the pile. //

Kevin Gifford



Harry and Henderson re-enact the Kama Sutra with hilarious results.

**XBN 06**  
OUT OF TEN

# XRATED

ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2005



Decorum prohibits the making of a "Got Wood?" joke.

## ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2005

PUBLISHER: Acclaim // DEVELOPER: Acclaim Studios Austin // PLAYERS: 2-4 // LIVE: Yes // MSRP: \$29.99 // ESRB: E

If you build it poorly, they won't come

It is startling that Acclaim Entertainment, a million-dollar company with a lineup of quality videogames, has put out a product as bad as *All-Star Baseball 2005*.

Playing *2005* with its jerky, disorienting fielder cam is akin to

slicing up your head on a cheese grater, then taking a vinegar bath.

Where to start? The new camera makes playing defense 100 percent not fun. To catch the ball, you follow arrows and red dots which point you in the right direction. You never judge the ball off the bat; instead,

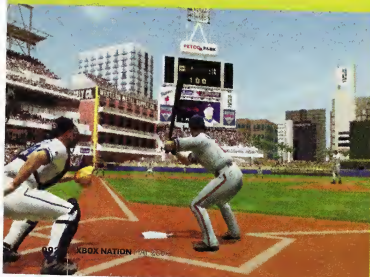
you rely on an unreliable view from an overhead vantage point. A player has minimal control over his own hurler's pitch location, which is usually the most fun part of a baseball game. Touted as the "most realistic" between the lines' experience," the new fielder cam—which shows hit baseballs from a fielder's perspective—is the baseball equivalent of *The Titanic*, post-iceberg. The cut between the hitter's view and the fielder's view is too jarring to make the mode worthwhile, and there's no sense of velocity or physics to the hit balls.

To the poor soul who considers plunking down \$40 on this crapola—save your dough. A cheese grater and a bottle of vinegar are infinitely cheaper. // Jeff Pearlman



### XBOX LIVE

Hoping Xbox Live support could be *All-Star Baseball 2005*'s saving grace? No such luck. A barrage of blunders kill any potential fun, notably the lack of control over the pitcher, batter, and fielder camera views; questionable plays at the plate; and the unexcusable garfles—which as the fielder retains possession of the ball you just saw scoot past him.



**XBN 03**  
OUT OF TEN



# XRATED

ESPN MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

# ESPN MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

PUBLISHER: Sega // DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts // PLAYERS: 1-2 // AGE: Yes // MSRP: \$39.99 // ESRB: E

## Can't anybody here play this game?

Since its inception more than 20 years ago, ESPN has brought countless innovations to the world of sports. Without the network, there'd be no SportsCenter, no Sunday Night Football, no X-Games, and no Stuart Scott or Dan Patrick (one could only hope).

Two decades have allowed for lots of fine-tuning of the product, but even so, there's been a misstep or

two. This year's *ESPN Major League Baseball* seems less polished than its brethren, its new features seem halfhearted at best, and its graphics don't pack the punch they used to.

A new first-person mode makes major league baseball seem like Little League after a bad day of crack-cocaine and electroshock. The disorienting camera cuts and pans, making judging balls—be they thrown to the batter or knocked into the outfield—the video equivalent of catching knives after staring at the sun. Nine innings of baseball played inside the Jefferson Valley Mall holds a greater appeal, and this poorly done gimmick seriously detracts from the overall whote.

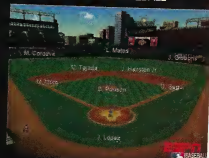
Fielding is equally mind numbing, in that the cutoff man is never missed, and throws from the outfield

are never too hard or soft. Bad outfielders like Chuck "Tumble Fingers" Knoblauch have a golden glove attached to their arms here. If you're hoping to be challenged, check elsewhere.

The stadiums in *Baseball* look beautiful, and the commentator tandem of Rex Hudler and Jon Miller is tolerable. But for some reason there is no fan noise. Zero. Zip. Nada. It's as if every contest—Yanks-Red Sox, Dodgers-Giants—takes place at Tropicana Field, the land where oomph goes to die.

In other words: Yawn. // Jeff Pearlman

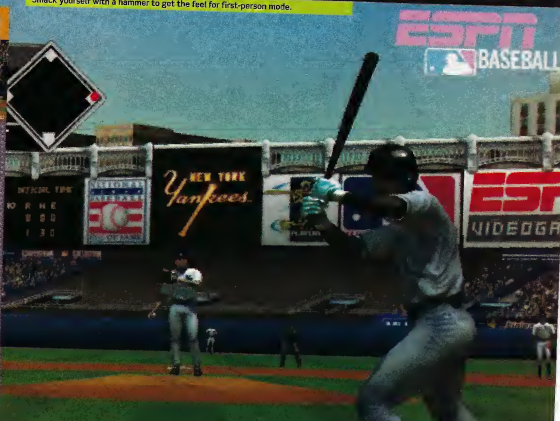
**XBN 05**  
OUT OF TEN



Smack yourself with a hammer to get the feel for first-person mode.

## XBOX LIVE

ESPN Major League Baseball's online mode could be more fleshed out, but what's there runs much better than what you'll find in All-Star Baseball 2005. You get ranked games and a leaderboard, downloadable content, smooth play, and some bonus stadiums to play in (Forbes Field, anyone?). But why no first-person baseball or home-run derby? For solid head-to-head play, this mode is a more than adequate way to continue those cross-country rivalries you started in ESPN NFL Football.



FIVE FOR FIGHTING

# FIVE FOR FIGHTING

XBN's guide to the top five Xbox brawlers

Man is a violent species, quick to anger and prone to sudden fits of rage. But for whatever reason, picking a random stranger on the street and striking him 100 times with your fists is still not socially acceptable behavior. Hence the existence of videogames. As such, *Xbox Nation* has examined the current crop of fighting games available for Xbox, and after many hours of careful deliberation, spirited debate, and the drawing of straws of differing lengths, it has selected the system's top five brawlers. Behold!

01

## SOUL CALIBUR 2

PUBLISHER: Namco // DEVELOPER: Namco // DESC: Burning Soul Mates

Logic, as well as the millions upon millions of deaths throughout the course of human history, shows that it's much easier to do harm to another person with a weapon than it is by the bare hand. And in the context of relatively harmless and consequence-free videogames, it's slightly more fun. As such, it's alarmingly easy to fall in love with *Soul Calibur II*, what with its stunning aesthetic beauty, its warm and welcoming nature, and its ability to light up a room every time a console is powered on. If the impending Federal Marriage Amendment allows for it and it's ratified by a three-fourths majority of state legislatures, everyone would totally be wedded to this game.



## CAPCOM VS. SNK 2: EO

PUBLISHER: Capcom // DEVELOPER: Capcom // DESC: A Groove Thing

Granted, a Dan versus Joe matchup isn't quite as sexy as three Spider-Men facing off against a team of Captains America, but *Capcom vs. SNK 2: EO's* sex appeal is in its smarts—it's got that whole hot-librarian thing going on. And with arcades harder to find than—dare one

make a WMD joke here?—these days, *EO's* Xbox Live capabilities make for an all-night party line. It was a collaboration between two competitors leading to *EO's* existence, and the world could not be happier that the two teams known for crafting excellent fighting games got along so well.



## MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 2

PUBLISHER: Capcom // DEVELOPER: Capcom // DESC: 457-Hit Combo!

➤ Capcom's Vs. series, pre-SNK, was always more about over-the-top combinations, supermoves filling at least three screens of real estate, and lightning-fast tag-team action. In other words, you were expected to fight like a total spaz. Featuring such dream matchups as Mega Man versus *Resident Evil*'s Jill and Magneto versus old-school favorite *Spider-Man*, *Marvel vs. Capcom 2*'s obvious appeal lies in its massive roster of characters, familiar and obscure alike. And whereas the first *Marvel vs. Capcom* featured a two-on-two setup with a third helper character, the sequel indulges players even further by making the third teammate fully playable.



## DEAD OR ALIVE 3

PUBLISHER: Tecmo // DEVELOPER: Team Ninja // DESC: Simply the Breast

➤ "She kicks high": almost-famous words from the TV advertisement that accompanied the release of Tecmo's 3D brawler that not only prominently features the attractive female form, but also proudly celebrates the concept. Some decry *Dead or Alive 3* for using sex appeal to lure in curious adolescents and mask alleged gameplay deficiencies.

Others find all that bouncing around distracting but enjoy the compelling fistcuffs created by the game's counter-heavy flow and beautifully rendered, multilayered environments. And still another group of others finds that solid combat mechanics and mostly harmless eye candy don't have to be mutually exclusive things. That last one, most of all, makes sense.



## MORTAL KOMBAT: DEADLY ALLIANCE

PUBLISHER: Midway // DEVELOPER: Midway // DESC: Everybody Shang Tsung Tonight

➤ Game magazine writers, Internet message-board denizens, and the residents of Shady Acres Home for Recovering Arcade Junkies generally agree that the best version of *Mortal Kombat* is, in fact, *Mortal Kombat II*. Once the shock value of the original *Kombat* wore off (Ohmygod! Blood!), it became clear the game was actually not that great. *Kombat II* was a much

bigger deal...and come on, it had a playable Reptile! Ever since then, it's been a gradual downhill slide—*Kombat III*, *Mortal Kombat Trilogy*, IV...and the less said about that Sub-Zero adventure game, the better. *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*, though, was a big step in the right direction...and hopefully the upcoming *Mortal Kombat VI* follows the same path.



# DEAD MAN'S HAND

PUBLISHER: Atari // DEVELOPER: Human Head Studios // PLAYERS: 1-8 // LIVE: Yes // MSRP: \$29.99 // ESRB: T

## Hands-down the best Western shooter on Xbox

Dead Man's Hand deftly proves Lee Marvin's classic beat-em-up flick *Point Blank* can be retooled for any genre or era. This time, you're a badass Mexican named El Tejon who, like Lee Marvin, is betrayed and left for dead. *Hand* chronicles Tejon's death-filled quest for revenge as you ravage the Old West in order to track down and kill the members of

your back-stabbing gang, The Nine.

The mere fact that *Hand* takes place in the West instead of some postapocalyptic dystopia scores it originality points—the game also incorporates a neat little scoring system and poker, of all things. The Legends system gives you points for shooting objects or making slick trick shots (shooting a gun out of someone's hand or the hat off their head). These points also increase your power meter, which allows you to use your weapons' secondary attacks (like the shotgun's stun feature). It encourages you to make better shots, which in turn lets you use your secondary-fire options more often.

When you're not shooting, you're playing poker. Between levels, you're dealt a hand of poker which, depending on how you play, gives you bonuses like more ammunition

or fill-ups to your power meter. It's history come to life.

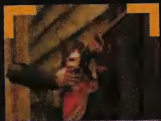
*Hand* is very solid and playable, and only a few mistakes detract from the experience. Much as how most of space is dull and gray in other shooters, a lot of *Hand* is, well, dust brown; even though there are neat levels with saloon fights and chases on horseback, they all pretty much take place in the olde tyme desert out in the West. And despite the other innovations, the rest of the game is very straightforward. Then again, if you thought shooters needed more Stetson hats and Winchester rifles, you can't go wrong with this one. //

Thierry Nguyen

## XBN 07

CUT OPEN

Here's an appealing fellow they'll be a-peeling off that trap.



### XBOX LIVE

Yes, you can affect your best draw and start hollerin' and shootin' online! Besides the traditional online shooter options (voice chat, deathmatch, etc.), there's the unique posse mode: You and a bunch of online buds form a posse and defend yourselves against waves of bandits. The game uses the latest version of the Unreal engine, so expect similar online performance.

## FILE UNDER L:

## DRAKE OF THE 99 DRAGONS

PUBLISHER: Majesco // DEVELOPER: Mid // PLAYERS: 1 // LIVE: No // MSRP: \$19.99 // ESRB: T

Loser File mathematics: 99 Dragons + 99 butts = lots of dung

➤ **What we said then:** "The camera alone is enough to condemn *Drake of the 99 Dragons* to the eighth circle of gaming hell."

➤ **What we say now:** At the beginning of *Drake*, Drake will immediately tell you that most people he meets...he meets only once! Plus, get this: Life is all about death. But before those words can chill you to the bone, you'll notice that if Dracuta were cruising for boys at an undead leather bar, Drake is who he's hoping to bring home. Drake is a shirtless boy toy in a fitted trench coat and stretch pants, sort of like *The Matrix* meets BABYLOU.

What makes Drake so deadly is that while he prances in one direction, he can fire his guns in another. Normally, this is a pretty cool way to kill something, but there's a thin line between dramatic gun pointing and just plain razzmatazz. Actually, it's not a thin line. You have to cross a huge, huge trench to get to where Drake is. His dramatic pistol waving is so overdone that if someone walked into the room

while you were playing, they'd ask what made the cheerleader in your game about male cheerleaders so mad that he's shooting everything.

If you can get over the fact that Drake learned how to gunfight from Vanna White, and good luck with that, the game still doesn't work. At any point, the camera might decide that you get to watch the action from behind a wall, and Drake is so determined to do yoga during a gunfight that he can be facing 300 enemies and still contort himself to shoot an empty spot on the floor behind him. There's some sort of plot about a missing religious artifact or, whatever, but the real conflict in the game is the struggle between your attempts at controlling Drake and his desire to DANCE! //

Seanbaby



Vogue, Drake, Vogue! Vogue as if your life depended on it!

## XBOZO!

Character assassination made easy  
NO. 2: CHOPS

**Crimes against humanity:** Being the ugliest character in *Mad Dash Racing*, and that is saying something. Criminal misuse of a leather jacket and spiked helmet in the first degree.

**Appeared in:** *Mad Dash Racing*

➤ The official promotional website for *Mad Dash Racing* (<http://www.maddashracing.com/>) includes, among other things, a series of character profiles. The idea, presumably, is to snare potential players into this web of lies and deceit by offering them a character they can relate to, someone or

something that's on their wavelength. So the question is, what unfortunate soul is on the same wavelength as this floating piece of crap? "This motorhead loves the ladies, but it's usually not mutual. Most likely it's his crude, flatulent table manners that leave him lonely every night."

It's hard to say which character the Xbox-playing audience is supposed to identify with more—Chops or Zero-G, who's profile contains far more references to the consumption of urine than you'd think a publisher with a vested interest in wanting to sell a game would care to make.



1: 05: 53

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# XTRA

OUT OF THE BOX

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## STUFF

Gotta get you some

### 1 TRANSFORMERS MASTERPIECE MP-1 OPTIMUS PRIME CONVOY

\$150; Google it or try [www.hj.com](http://www.hj.com)  
Beautifully re-created in die-cast metal and plastic parts, the Masterpiece Optimus Prime Convoy is the stuff young and old boys' dreams are made of. It smoothly transforms from robot mode to vehicle mode and has an arsenal of weapons that includes an energy ax, Megatron gun, and laser rifle. You love it.

### 2 PCS VISION VIDEO PHONE

\$380; [www.sprintpcs.com](http://www.sprintpcs.com)  
Here comes trouble. Sprint and Sanyo paired up to create the Sanyo VM4500, the first phone in the U.S. with the ability to shoot 15-second digital video clips with sound. It comes with a built-in high-luminance LED that serves as a flash or movie light, so whether it's light or dark, you can beam trouble across the Internet or straight to your pal who also plunked down \$400 for a video phone and has Sprint service.

### 3 FUTURAMA VOLUME THREE

\$50; [www.foxhome.com](http://www.foxhome.com)  
Kindly magicians at Fox have taken concentrated funny in the form of 22 *Futurama* episodes and shoehorned them onto four DVDs. Consume burning hot jets of hilarity as alcoholic robot Bender becomes a murderous Santa, or wet yourself with gongolistic glee when Amazonians patiently explain the nature of women's basketball ("We no can dunk, but good fundamentals").

### 4 PIONEER ELITE DVR-810H

\$1,200; [www.pioneerelectronics.com](http://www.pioneerelectronics.com)  
Thanks to Pioneer, for \$1,200 you will never miss anything ever again. Featuring an 80-gigabyte hard drive, it lets you schedule and record programs while playing a DVD, play programs from the hard drive while recording from it onto a DVD, and transfer content at breakneck speeds from the hard drive to a DVD. Now if only you had enough money left over to afford TiVo service.





# ESSENTIAL SELECTION

Xbox Nation picks the 50 best Xbox games to date

## Halo



Dev: Bungie Pub: Microsoft

**We like:** Launch titles that rule, as well as season two of Red versus Blue.

**We don't like:** Waiting around for a sequel.

10 OUT OF TEN

## Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time



Dev: Ubisoft Montreal Pub: Ubisoft

**We like:** Revisits that do justice to the originals.

**We don't like:** Being bum-rushed by demons you can't tell apart.

10 OUT OF TEN

## Grand Theft Auto Double Pack



Dev: Rockstar Vienna, Pub: Rockstar Games

**We like:** Two-for-one deals. Fingers on our hands. Straight thugging.

**We don't like:** Public outcry about declining morals in videogames.

10 OUT OF TEN

## Steel Battalion



Dev: Capcom Pub: Capcom

**We like:** Innovation and unapologetically huge controllers.

**We don't like:** Not reaching the eject button in time and having saves wiped.

10 OUT OF TEN

## Soul Calibur II



Dev: Electronic Arts Canada Pub: Electronic Arts

**We like:** Finally getting our hands on a good, playable Spawn. Virtually, that is.

**We don't like:** Having to unlock Seung Mina and Sophitia.

9 OUT OF TEN

## Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic



Dev: BioWare Pub: Microsoft

**We like:** Choices that affect your appearance, and possible Jedidom.

**We don't like:** Occasional graphical glitches, but they're pretty minor.

9 OUT OF TEN

## Breakdown



Dev: Mosaic Pub: Mosaic

**We like:** Flexing our long-used Punch-Out! skills, this time in the proper setting.

**We don't like:** Amnesia as a plot device, no matter how effective it may be.

9 OUT OF TEN

## Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow



Dev: Ubisoft Pub: Ubisoft/Thailand

**We like:** An online component that doesn't feel like a half-assed afterthought.

**We don't like:** Getting busted by the randomizer, not our lack of skill.

9 OUT OF TEN

## Project Gotham Racing 2



Dev: Game Creations Pub: Microsoft

**We like:** Seamless, sensible integration with Xbox Live, even in single player.

**We don't like:** Relentless AI opponents and strictly stock options for your ride.

9 OUT OF TEN

## The Sims: Bustle Out



Dev: Mosaic Pub: Electronic Arts

**We like:** Being able to remember to tend to our plants and bladders in real life.

**We don't like:** Waking up to grisly reality when it's Sim bedtime.

9 OUT OF TEN

## Madden NFL 2004



Dev: EA Sports Pub: EA Sports

**We like:** Owner mode, because we're fond of keeping a close eye on margins.

**We don't like:** Wondering if EA and Microsoft will ever kiss and make up.

9 OUT OF TEN

## Metal Arms: Glitch in the System



Dev: Brightlight Age Studios Pub: Vivendi Universal

**We like:** Unrepentant cuteness, as long as it's accompanied by good gameplay.

**We don't like:** No online support—not even a little.

9 OUT OF TEN

### Top Spin



Dev: Pandemon Studios; Pub: Microsoft

**We like:** Tennis games that are really RPGs in drag. Shit! Don't tell.

**We don't like:** Reading about tennis. Unless D.F. Wallace is doing the writing.

9 OUT OF TEN

### Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3



Dev: Ubisoft Montreal; Pub: Ubisoft

**We like:** Realism in tactical shooters. Actually, the convincing illusion of reality.

**We don't like:** Being cussed at by 1,337 h4x0r5 two states away.

9 OUT OF TEN

### Panzer Dragoon Origin



Dev: Sega; Pub: Sega

**We like:** Being on rails—when the rails rule this much. Prequels don't hurt, either.

**We don't like:** Confined spaces with wilful cameras and tough enemies.

9 OUT OF TEN

### NBA Live 2004



**We like:** Developers who pay attention to little things. Like rubber bands. A much-improved franchise mode doesn't hurt, either.

**We don't like:** Not being able to take this baby out on the information superhighway, as well as too-easy, lunging one-handed 40-forters.

9 OUT OF TEN

### Burnout 2: Point of Impact



Dev: Criterion; Pub: EA/Gameloft

**We like:** Driving on the wrong side of the road—and that's not a swipe at Simon.

**We don't like:** Burning through Burnout in a couple of days. And burns in general.

9 OUT OF TEN

### Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance



Dev: Kojima; Pub: Konami

**We like:** As much Metal Gear as we can get our grubby little meat hooks on.

**We don't like:** Feeling left out when everyone else gets to skateboard.

9 OUT OF TEN

### Beyond Good & Evil



Dev: Ubisoft; Pub: Ubisoft

**We like:** Charm, grace, Rastafarian rhinoceroses, and photojournalists.

**We don't like:** Insta-Boss® brand final bosses and letdowns at the end.

9 OUT OF TEN

### NBA Street Vol. 2



Dev: Electronic Arts; Publisher: Electronic Arts

**We like:** Shammie-shams, heads or tails, cook 'ems, fole gas, and getting bent.

**We don't like:** Not being able to listen to Abba or Morbid Angel while dunking.

9 OUT OF TEN

### SSX 3



Dev: EA GIG; Pub: Electronic Arts

**We like:** Series that haven't started to suck. Quite the opposite, actually.

**We don't like:** Sounding like a broken record, but we'd really like SSX on Live.

9 OUT OF TEN

### FIFA Football 2004



Dev: Electronic Arts; Canada: Pub: Electronic Arts

**We like:** Electronic Arts finally coming through with a quality soccer game.

**We don't like:** The whole MS/EA snitfest. Get it together, fellas.

9 OUT OF TEN

### Need for Speed Underground



Dev: Electronic Arts; Pub: EA/GIG

**We like:** Tweaking our rides out and not having to worry about cops.

**We don't like:** An endless supply of money. Never thought you'd hear that, huh?

9 OUT OF TEN

### Lord of the Rings: Return of the King



Dev: Monolith; Arts: Pub: Electronic Arts

**We like:** Cinematic and lavishly produced videogame excellence.

**We don't like:** Feeling like we're being talked down to.

9 OUT OF TEN

### Sega GT Online



Dev: Sega; Pub: Sega

**We like:** That it's 20 bucks and sports sick online tricks.

**We don't like:** That it's sort of an updated version of last year's game.

9 OUT OF TEN

## NASCAR Thunder 2004

Dev: Electronic Arts Pub: Electronic Arts

**We like:** Adaptive (comparatively), intelligent opponents who hold grudges.**We don't like:** Very many other NASCAR games.

9 OUT OF TEN

## NFL 2K3

Dev: Sega Sports Pub: Sega

**We like:** Precipitation-activated virtual mud and other quantum improvements.**We don't like:** Getting four-player games instead of broadband deliciousness.

9 OUT OF TEN

## NBA 2K2

Dev: Visual Concepts Pub: Sega

**We like:** Better posing, tattoos where they ought to be, and better textures.**We don't like:** Being dunked upon frequently and successfully.

9 OUT OF TEN

## World Series Baseball 2K3

Dev: Sega Sports Pub: Sega

**We like:** Exhaustive research and attention to detail.**We don't like:** The thought of attaining baseball perfection, thus ceasing to be.

8 OUT OF TEN

## Otogi

Dev: From Software Pub: Sega

**We like:** Cameras that behave themselves and demons who die just so.**We don't like:** Working for Princess. No overtime, lousy pay, half-hour lunches.

8 OUT OF TEN

## RalliSport Challenge

Dev: Digital Illusions Pub: Microsoft

**We like:** Games that grow on you over time and are deep enough to replay.**We don't like:** Blandness and delayed gratification in lieu of flashy presentation.

8 OUT OF TEN

## TimeSplitters 2

Dev: Free Radical Pub: Xbox

**We like:** Ten levels of diverse environments and improved graphics.**We don't like:** Being thrown into boss battles without warning, and opaque goals.

8 OUT OF TEN

## Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne

Dev: Remedy Pub: Blackstar Games

**We like:** Bullet time and hard-boiled stuff. You know, like eggs and cops.**We don't like:** How quickly it's all over—although preferable to the alternative.

9 OUT OF TEN

## MVP Baseball 2004

Dev: Electronic Arts Pub: EA Sports

**We like:** Venting our frustrations on scrubs like the Tulsa Drillers.**We don't like:** Having to unlock vintage outfits—what's up with that?

9 OUT OF TEN

## Armed and Dangerous

Dev: Activision Publishing Pub: Activision

**We like:** Blowing stuff up, which everyone knows is catharsis at its finest. Butt humor is always a big plus for us as well, and there's no shortage of it here.**We don't like:** That damn mountain path and the repetition inherent in a game about blowing a lot of stuff up.

8 OUT OF TEN

## Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge

Dev: PASA Studios Pub: Microsoft

**We like:** The backstory, complete with epic proportions and so on.**We don't like:** Being the equivalent of the mail-room guy in aerial combat.

8 OUT OF TEN

## Jet Set Radio Future

Dev: Sega Pub: Sega

**We like:** Ninety-degree grinds, revisited controls, and more leisure time for art.**We don't like:** Cops and spray paint in an electrically fenced-in environment.

8 OUT OF TEN

## killswitch

Dev: Neoware Pub: Neoware/Bishop

**We like:** Strapping and macking, strategizing and fine-tuned control.**We don't like:** Low replay value, which is directly proportional to its Live-ness.

8 OUT OF TEN



## Phantasy Star Online: Episode I &amp; II

Dev: Sonic Team Pub: Sega

**We like:** Sonic Team's charm, free keyboard adapters and multiplayer RPG-ing.**We don't like:** Mandatory monthly fees in excess of what two burritos cost.

8 OUT OF TEN

## Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004

Dev: Electronic Arts Pub: Electronic Arts

**We like:** Enchanted jerseys of driving with a +5 against sand traps.**We don't like:** Playing offline until the next one comes out (or perhaps forever).

8 OUT OF TEN

## The Simpsons: Hit &amp; Run

Dev: Radical Entertainment Pub: Viacom/Universal

**We like:** Grand Theft Auto-style exploration with neither hookers nor gangsters, but plenty of gags only longtime Simpsons viewers will catch.**We don't like:** The whole Poochie-the-rockin'-dog debacle, and too many by-the-numbers fetch quests.

8 OUT OF TEN

## Amped 2

Dev: Microsoft Pub: Microsoft

**We like:** Swank online-enabled snowboarding while hunting snowmen.**We don't like:** Rails and jumps that are still problematic and inconsistent.

8 OUT OF TEN

## 007: Everything or Nothing

Dev: EA Redwood Shores Pub: EA Games

**We like:** Faithful Bond action with classic henchmen and tight control.**We don't like:** Funky camera acrobatics and inventory-system antics.

8 OUT OF TEN

## Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind—Game of the Year Edition

Dev: Bethesda Refinitory Pub: Bethesda Softworks

**We like:** More of what we liked the first time.**We don't like:** Small improvements, but at least it's priced accordingly.

8 OUT OF TEN

## Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell

Dev: Ubisoft Montreal Pub: Ubisoft

**We like:** Ninja-like stealth with high-tech gadgetry and moral implications.**We don't like:** Lackluster story lines, especially when approved by a headline.

8 OUT OF TEN

## Dynasty Warriors 4

Dev: Koei Pub: Koei

**We like:** Heavy-duty depth and overstimulation city.**We don't like:** The occasional graphics glitch. And wearing out our X button.

8 OUT OF TEN

## MotoGP 2

Dev: Yamaha Pub: Yamaha

**We like:** Authenticity and believability in a motorcycle videogame, Gran Turismo-style.**We don't like:** Unforgiving, if occasionally spectacular, physics and plain-old difficulty.

8 OUT OF TEN

## Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

Dev: EA/Gammonfront Pub: EA

**We like:** An LOTR game that lives up to the story and movie's standards.**We don't like:** Little flaws in animations and hack-and-slash redux, even if faithful.

8 OUT OF TEN

## Deus Ex: Invisible War

Dev: Ion Storm Pub: Ion Storm

**We like:** Newtonian mechanics made flesh. And consequences. Sometimes.**We don't like:** The idea of predestination.

8 OUT OF TEN

## Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon

Dev: Revolution Pub: The Adventure Company

**We like:** Any videogame with the Knights Templar in them.**We don't like:** Poverty, chastity, obedience.

8 OUT OF TEN

# HOOKUPS

Need a little something extra? *Xbox Nation* recommends...



## LOGITECH CORDLESS CONTROLLER

PRICE: \$69.95  
www.logitech.com

Logitech proclaims, "The Logitech Cordless Controller for Xbox is the controller you've been waiting for," and they're right if you're one who pines over comfortable and well-made peripherals.



## ACTION REPLAY

PRICE: \$29.95  
www.dateldirect.com

Cheaters always prosper with the Action Replay. It lets you download saved games and cheats and store save files—if you have an Xbox, a PC running Windows 98, an Internet connection, and a free USB port.



## MAD CATZ BLASTER

PRICE: \$99  
www.madcatz.com

When zombies come looking for sweet brain flesh, have the Blaster handy. It's got auto-fire capabilities, built-in vibration function, and a rubber handgrip. Note: This works only on videogame zombies, stupid.



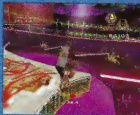
## MAGIC BOX

PRICE: \$24.90  
www.liik-sang.com

The Magic Box seemingly has been produced by dream wizards who envisioned a world where Xbox owners could play their games with Dreamcast, Saturn, or PlayStation 2 controllers.

# ...BE AFRAID. BE VERY AFRAID

Five games that you should not, under any circumstances, pay for



## TOXIC GRIND

DEV: BLUE SHIRT TIGER TWO

→ This message comes from the terrifying year 2088, flesh humans Decades into your primitive "Earth" future, extreme sports will be declared illegal. Outlaw bike riders will be forced into radness for the amusement of our advanced superpeople. Those who fail, DIE. It's this stupid plot that helps punish any fool foolish enough to buy *Toxic Grind* instead of one of the 100 other games exactly like it, only better.

XBN SCORE: 3



## DINOTOPIA: THE SUNSTONE ODYSSEY

DEV: VIOLET CYCLE PUB TDK INTERACTIVE

→ Boring quests with a talking-dinosaur theme. Something's inherently wrong about facing a deadly prehistoric beast, only to have it politely ask you to pick up its dry cleaning.

XBN SCORE: 2



## TERMINATOR: DAWN OF FATE

DEV: PARADOX ENT. PUBL. INFOGAMES

→ Clunky controls and bad graphics, along with a madman-controlled camera, ensure that you'll spend most of your war against the terminators stuck running against a stack of crates.

XBN SCORE: 2



## BACKYARD WRESTLING

DEV: PARADOX DEV. PUBL. EBOS INTERACTIVE

→ Since ancient times, man has always dreamt of jumping off the roof and beating a kid to death with garbage...historians just never thought it would suck this much.

XBN SCORE: 2



## EVIL DEAD: PISTFUL OF BOOMSTICK

DEV: VS INTERACTIVE. PUBL. THQ

→ The real conflict in this game is the battle between the nonsensical puzzles and the repetitive zombie-bonking to see which one will get you to quit playing first.

XBN SCORE: 3



## PRIMA STRATEGY GUIDES

Hitman: Contracts, Ninja Gaiden, Halo: Baldur's Gate II: Dark Alliance. Dozens of pizza-fed, strategy-writing dumplings have paid with their sanity during the creation of these official guides. Show your appreciation by nabbing a copy at your nearest retailer.

# TIPS AND TRICKS

Why? Because *Ninja Gaiden* isn't getting any easier. Plus *Hitman*, *Breakdown*, and more!

How many times have you thought, "Look, I've been pushing four crates around a sewer/military base/disco for an hour now. What gives?" Another favorite is "This midboss has a flashing red/purple/mauve weak spot on its head/back/buttocks, but I can't target it!" And who could forget the classic "Dude, it would be so awesome if all

my basketballers/footballers/pimps had massive swollen heads, you dig?" XBN has heard your plaintive cries for trick salvation and has vowed to give you the best tippage around. Here are the results:

## HITMAN: CONTRACTS

### The hits just keep coming

Take one angry bald man in a sharp suit. Remove all traces of Sikh enemies after last season's faux pas. Add even crazier level design, addictive plans for dismemberment, and a bad guy with a test name that sounds rude, and simmer in said bald man's burning rage for 45 minutes until highly riled. You've got the recipe for *Hitman: Contracts*. And here for an appetizer is a series of supremely polished ways to finish off some key levels without mucking things up. Review next issue—we promise!

#### HITMAN TIP NO. 1



#### TRADITIONS OF THE TRADE

Due to the many security guards at the hotel, Traditions is a difficult mission to pass if you're attempting to earn the Silent Assassin rating. Follow these steps, and you'll have no trouble making the hits:

- Once inside the hotel, walk past the elevator and pick the lock on the east door, which reads "Hotel wing closed." Head to Room 108, pick the door's lock, then sneak inside and change into the hotel security uniform you find on the bed.
- Return to the lobby and enter the small lounge to the north. Look out a window and watch one of your targets, Fritz Fuchs, as he swims in the pool below. Wait for Fritz to stand up and walk toward the east sauna, then exit the lounge and return to the lobby.
- Enter the pool area by picking the lock on the lobby's northwest door and proceeding through the shower room. Walk around the pool, and enter the east sauna. Turn the red wheel near the door that leads into the sauna to suffocate Fritz Fuchs with scalding steam, then return to the lobby.



#### HITMAN TIP NO. 2



#### KILLING FRANZ FUCHS

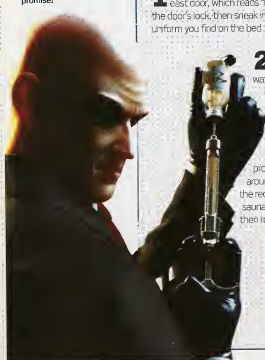
Franz Fuchs is taking a long shower in Room 202. He's protected by two bodyguards—one stands watch in the hallway just outside the room, while the other patrols inside, occasionally stepping out to the balcony for fresh air. You need to make the hit without alerting either bodyguard.

- Take the elevator up to the second floor, Room 202. He's protected by two bodyguards—one stands watch in the hallway just outside the room, while the other patrols inside, occasionally stepping out to the balcony for fresh air. You need to make the hit without alerting either bodyguard.

- Go out to the balcony, crouch down, and watch the adjacent balcony to the south. Wait for Franz's bodyguard to step out for air; then jump over to the south balcony after he reenters the room. Creep into the room and use a syringe to silently knock out the guard while his back is turned.



- With the guard out cold, sneak into the bathroom without making a sound and use the fiber wire to strangle Franz Fuchs. Pick up the suitcase that's sitting near Fuchs' bed and then exit the way you came in.







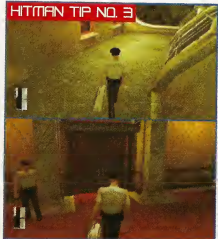
#### YOUR DAD'S ASSASSIN

**The Day of The Jackal** (1973) starred British rent-a-smoothie actor Edward Fox as 'The Jackal,' an assassin hired to kill French President Charles De Gaulle, while wearing Saville Row suits. Needless to say, Bruce Willis, who starred in the remake in 1997, was somewhat less debonair. Okay, a lot less debonair.

# XTRA

## HITMAN: CONTRACTS

### HITMAN TIP NO. 3



### RETRIEVING THE CHEMICAL BOMB

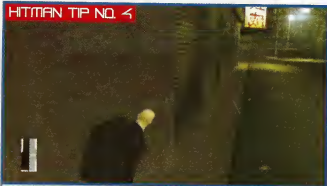
↳ Your client wants the Fuchs brothers' chemical bomb captured and brought back for research. The suitcase you grabbed from Franz's room allows you to carry the bomb through the hotel without raising suspicions.

**1** Head upstairs to the third floor. A northwest door on the third floor's east wing allows you access to the roof. Cross the roof and climb through one of the windows to enter a northeast room of the third floor's west wing.

**2** A bodyguard patrols the room, but he won't attack because you're disguised as one of the hotel's security guards. Walk through the west door and into the adjacent room. Walk past the bodyguard in this room and through another west door to locate the chemical bomb. Close the door behind you for privacy, pick up the chemical bomb, and stash it inside the suitcase.



### HITMAN TIP NO. 4



### MASSACRE AT THE CHEUNG CHAU FISH RESTAURANT

↳ Achieving the Silent Assassin rating on this mission is a real challenge, but here's how to make it easier. In a nutshell, your task is to frame the red dragon negotiator for the murders of the blue lotus negotiator and the chief of police. As the mission begins, all three targets are still en route to the restaurant.

**1** You begin near your getaway car. Leave the sniper suitcase on the ground near the vehicle and run north up the street. Duck into the northwest alley and watch as the red dragon negotiator walks toward you from the east side of town.

**2** The red dragon negotiator enters a nearby alley to relieve himself before his meeting with the blue lotus negotiator and the chief of police. Follow the red dragon negotiator into the alley, sneak close behind him, then choke him to death with the fiber wire. Quickly drag the body so that it falls into the sewer, where no one will find it.



**3** Climb down the ladder and into the sewer to collect the late red dragon negotiator's amulet and pistol. Disguise yourself as the red dragon negotiator by stealing his clothes, then climb up to the surface. Return to your getaway car and pick up the sniper suitcase you left there a short time ago.



### Secret Weapons

Achieving the Silent Assassin rating on each mission is challenging but very rewarding. When you earn the Silent Assassin rating on a mission, you unlock that mission's powerful hidden weapon, which is automatically stored in your weapons cache. To earn the Silent Assassin rating, you must not kill anyone except the targets you've been contracted to hit, and you may use only one silenced bullet per target. (You may also use stealth-kill weapons, like a kitchen knife or the fiber wire.) You forfeit the Silent Assassin rating if you receive too many alerts during a mission, so be, you know, quiet-like.

### HITMAN TIP NO. 5



### ONE SHOT, TWO KILLS

**1** Head south and look around for banister scaffolding. Climb up the scaffolding and sneak around the corner. Crouch down next to a fan that's blowing in the wind—it provides cover from the watchful policeman below. Assemble the sniper rifle.

**2** Crouch down and take aim at the window above the restaurant's large neon sign. The blue lotus negotiator and the chief of police are chatting on the second floor of the restaurant. Keep your crosshairs trained on the back of the blue lotus negotiator's skull and wait for the chief of police to lean back in his chair. Then kill both targets with a single bullet as they line up.

**3** Rack up the sniper rifle and sneak back down to the street. Find a safe spot to drop all of your weapons before heading to the restaurant. Go upstairs. Place the red dragon negotiator's amulet on the table next to the bodies of the blue lotus negotiator and the chief of police to complete that objective. Walk out of the restaurant and over to your getaway car to finish the mission with a Silent Assassin rating, unlocking the GK 17 pistol!





## KICK, MEET ASS!

realultimatepower.net may be the funniest nina site in the world. In case you ever wondered precisely what a nina is, their definition is here to help: "1. Ninjas are mammals. 2. Ninjas fight ALL the time. 3. The purpose of the nina is to flip out and kill people." Amen to that.



## NINJA GAIDEN

If these tips are even possible!



## Game of death

Ninja Gaiden: Harder than a solid titanium statue of Mr. T. So hard, in fact, that even adult gamers who have beaten both Super Mario Bros. 3 and Double Dragon on NES on the same day are weeping, shouting very rude words at their televisions, and rebuilding their controllers after stomping on them. "Oooh, those cavalry riders!" "Ack, that pink devil with the Janet Jackson nipple!" "Duch, those two damn tanks!" "Gahl! That second form of Doku, gnnngk!" "What I need are the best sword and flail combos, limitless health, and tips on how to wield Doku's blade without dying!" Funny you should mention that...



## ESSENTIAL DRAGON SWORD COMBOS AND ATTACKS

↳ Bar none, the Dragon Sword is going to be your weapon of choice, simply due to its versatility in just about every combat situation. Therein, you'll also discover that certain combos and attacks are much more valuable than others:



**Fang of the Wolf** (Level 2 technique)  
X, X, Y, Y



**Blade of Nirrti** (Level 2 technique)  
X, Y, X, X, X, X



**Divine Cicada Slash**  
During Flying Bird Flip: X or Y

## ESSENTIAL VIGGORDIAN FLAIL COMBOS AND ATTACKS

↳ Like the Dragon Sword, not all the combos and attacks at Ryu's fingertips are as useful as others. Here are the best weapons for jouncing foes great and small:

**Cremator** (Level 2 technique)  
X, X, X, Right + X, X, X, X, X  
**Dragon and Phoenix**  
X, X, X, X, X, X



↳ As you fight your way through night-riending waves of ninja and fiendish attackers, you'll probably wish you had a fount of health to give you a pick-me-up. The good news is that there is, indeed, a never-ending fount of health located just across the street from Han's Bar. Head down the alley depicted here, and you'll find a large silver "X" in the corner. Utilize it, and your life bar will be instantly replenished. The Windmill Shuriken is up there, too—and a damn fine throwing star it is.



↳ After striking down Doku, you'll come into possession of his cursed blade, Kitetsu, afflicting Ryu with a bad case of steady health drain. To counter this assault, collect at least 40 golden scarabs to earn the Armlet of Tranquility. Coupled with the cursed blade, it'll stem the transfer of life essence from Ryu to the sword—at the cost of the armlet's powers.



## WORST PLACE TO BREAKDOWN

**The Sahara desert:** With less than 3 inches of rainfall per year and covering a vast area roughly the same size as the USA, this is not a good place to get a flat, flip out, go jogging, or attempt a crossing riding one of those Segway things. If you do ever think of visiting, remember this: THERE'S NOTHING THERE.

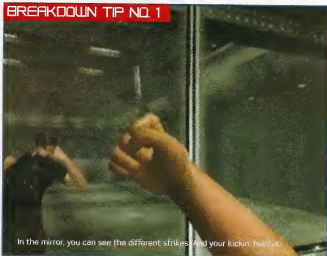
# XTRA

BREAKDOWN

## BREAKDOWN

### Armed and dangerous

#### BREAKDOWN TIP NO. 1



In the mirror, you can see the different strikes and your kick's height.

### GIVING DERRICK A HAND

↳ When you engage in melee combat, there are several moves you can use to damage your enemies. The strength of a move is proportional to how long it takes to do. A quick jab, for instance, is not very powerful, but it can be thrown fast, interrupting an enemy's attack. A high kick, in contrast, takes a while to develop, but the damage it does can be devastating. The combos will serve you well since you can usually link them to a jab, allowing you to start quickly and end with a strong hit.

The hand-to-hand stuff is best used against Tlan enemies. In fact, it's the only stuff you can use against them since they block all conventional weaponry. And because the Tlan are wickedly tough, you'll need to be good at kicking butt to survive.

The major tactic you must remember when dealing with Tlan is to be afraid of two or more of them coming at you at once. Try to get some separation as you fight. Use hit-and-run tactics (auto-targeting can make this tough, so remember to untarget an enemy before running away) and use whatever space you have. Sometimes running past a group of enemies and then turning to fight gets you in a better position with more room to maneuver.



This pair is no fun. Run past them to the burning room, so you have space to maneuver.

#### BREAKDOWN TIP NO. 2



A squad doesn't care about your martial arts. Use technology to bring them down.

### FULL METAL COMBAT

↳ Armed combat is a different animal compared with the hand-to-hand stuff. When faced with soldiers, put away your dukes and pull out the hardware.

Kudos to Breakdown for making the enemy humans almost as tough as you are: everyone's sick of grunts weaker than a Pacific Shore punch line. Add to that the fact that your submachine gun has pretty lousy accuracy at range. To get the most out of your bullets, target a single enemy and use single trigger pulls to fire off shots. Holding the trigger down just wastes ammo since the gun shudders every which way, keeping your enemy safe. Find cover, pop out and squeeze off a round or two, and then duck back to cover. No sharpie in hiding until there's a pause in the shooting. If you run out of ammo, you have two choices. One, if Alex is with you, let her take care of the remaining soldiers. Or at least let her draw their attention as you rush up for a beatdown.



Two, run from cover to cover when the firing pauses. Get as close as you can and then jump out to engage them hand to hand. Then hope that one of them has a ration bar handy to replenish your health.

### Basic melee combat moves

Quick Jab: Left Trigger

Straight Punch: Right Trigger

Uppercut: Move Left Joystick to the Left + Right Trigger

High Kick: Move Left Joystick Up + Left Trigger

Kick: Move Left Joystick Down + Right Trigger

Back-Fist Punch: Move Left Joystick to the Right + Left Trigger

One-Two Punch: Left Trigger, Right Trigger

Right Straight Punch to Right Kick Combo: Right Trigger, Right Trigger

One-Two Punch to Right Kick Combo: Left Trigger, Right Trigger, Right Trigger

Back Flip: Move Left Joystick Down + Black Button, Black Button

Evasive Roll: Move Left Joystick either Left or Right + Black Button, Black Button

Guard: Press Left Joystick Down and hold



**XBN WANTS YOUR TIPS!** That's right—we want you to send in your coolest tips, cheats, and secrets. The best ones will be printed in the pages of XBN, and if we don't get many, then some of the worst ones, too! E-mail them to us at [XBN@ziffdavis.com](mailto:XBN@ziffdavis.com).





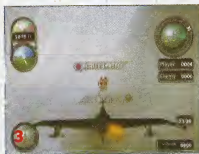
## CODE-X

## Your number's up

➤ This month, XBN unlocks maric MX Unleashed bike equipment, a sanity-sapping number of Sonic Heroes secrets, old-school Pitfall action, and a shedload of Grand Theft Auto codes. Don't miss the god code in Rainbow Six 3 either; that one makes things so much easier. Not that you need it, obviously. But hey, it's there if you feel like "checking it out."



## SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY



➤ Cheats away, Ginger! Ready to take to the skies above French-land in a TIE Fighter? Tally-bolly-no, of course you are.

**1. All Planes**

Y, Y, Y, X, X, X, Left, Right, Black, Black, White, White

**2. God Mode**

Up, Down, Left, Right, Left, Left, Right, Right, L, L, R, R, White, Black

**3. Infinite Ammo**

Up, Right, Down, Left, Up, Right, Down, Left, L, R

**4. All Instant Action**

Up, Down, Left, Right, L, R, L, R Stages



## SONIC HEROES



➤ Take the challenge and turn your hedgehog into gleaming steel with these cheats. Sadly, no "make the camera more manageable" codes have been released.

**Metall Characters**

Hold A + Y once you pick a level in two-player mode.

**Two-Player Team Battle Mode**

Collect 20 emblems.

**Two-Player Special Stage Mode**

Collect 40 emblems.

**Two-Player Ring Race Mode**

Collect 60 emblems.

**Two-Player Bobbed Race Mode**

Collect 80 emblems.

**Two-Player Quick Race Mode**

Collect 100 emblems.

**Two-Player Expert Race Mode**

Collect 120 emblems.

**Super Hand Mode**

Collect 141 emblems and have all A ranks.

**Last Story Mode**

Complete story mode with all four teams and all Chaos emeralds.

**Team Rose Song and Movie**

Complete story mode with Team Rose.

**Team Chaotix Song and Movie**

Complete story mode with Team Chaotix.

**Team Dark Song and Movie**

Complete story mode with Team Dark.

**Team Sonic Movie and Song**

Complete story mode with Team Sonic.

**Last Song and Movie**

Complete the last story.

**...AND, UH, WE ALSO WANT YOUR CODES...** That's right—not content with merely using our readers to write tips and secrets for us, we're now asking you to send in your juiciest codes. If they're good, send them to: [XBN@ziffdavis.com](mailto:XBN@ziffdavis.com).

## MX UNLEASHED



↳ Dirt bikes get a teeny-tiny, cute makeover, plus everything bonus-based is unlocked in one fell swoop. Enter all codes at the Career Completion menu in the Cheats section.

**All Bonuses**  
clapped out  
**50cc Bikes**  
scurleldog  
**Professional Physics**  
swappin

## RAINBOW SIX 3



↳ Maybe I finally found it, way down here in the mud. Maybe from down here I can start up again, be something I can be proud of, without having to fake it, be a fake human being. If, however, you're intent on faking it, try these invulnerability and "krazy" laser-shots-from-enemy-characters codes, pronto! Tap 'em out during the game, and remember, somewhere out there is the beast, and he's hungry tonight.

### God Mode

Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A

### Enemy "Laser"

Up, Down, Up, Down, Zoom, Zoom  
Bullets



**Prima:**  
now  
more  
than  
ever.

Realistic, frankly, we've got better things to do than sit around all day testing codes. This game is our fave! (A partner in bringing you this section. They don't do the stuff like the Supermet Selection Images, or the amazing little bits that run along the tops of magazines, but they do a fine job of providing you with fresh class tips and tricks for the game you're playing, as we speak. Thanks, Prima!

## GTA 3



### Explode Car

White, Black, L, R, White, Black, Y, X, B, Y, White, L

### Floating Cars After Launching

Right, Black, B, R, White, Down, L, R

### Instant Tank

B, B, B, B, B, B, R, White, L, Y, B, Y

### Superb Car Handling

(press in the analog stick to jump)  
R, L, Black, L, Left, R, Y

### Invisible Cars

L, L, X, Black, Y, L, Y

### Gore Mode

X, L, B, Down, L, R, Y, Right, L, A

### Higher Wanted Level

Black, Black, L, Black, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right

### Lower Wanted Level

Black, Black, L, Black, Up, Down, Up, Down, Up, Down

### Instant Cash

Black, Black, L, L, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up

### Unhinged Pedestrians

Black, R, Y, A, White, L, Up, Down

### Pedestrian Hatred

Down, Up, Left, Up, A, R, Black, L, White

### Pedestrian Animosity

(boxing)  
Right, Black, B, R, White, Down, L, R

### Pedestrian Animosity (fighting)

Down, Up, Left, Up, A, R, Black, White, L

### All Weapons

Black, Black, L, Black, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up

### Full Armor

Black, Black, L, White, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up

### Maximum Health

Black, Black, L, R, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up

### New Outfit (again to change)

Right, Down, Left, Up, L, White, Up, Left, Down, Right

### Time Quickens

B, B, B, X, X, X, X, X, L, Y, B, Y, Faster Time

### Gameplay Slowdown

Y, Up, Right, Down, X, R, Black

### Gameplay Speeds Up

Y, Up, Right, Down, X, L, White

### Fabulous Weather

L, White, R, Black, Black, R, White, Y

### Cloudy Weather

L, White, R, Black, Black, R, White, X

### Foggy Weather

L, White, R, Black, Black, R, White, A

### Rainy Weather

(boxing)  
L, White, R, Black, Black, R, White, B





THAT WAS  
THEN

see what's  
**NEXT**



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**GF GAMEFLY.**  
rent smart. play harder.